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HOUSE'S SILENT TIDE
BY
L. F. JOHNSON

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by

C. F. FARRAR

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The plates in this reprint have been placed at the end of the book, and have been re-arranged from the original book.

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“OUSE’S SILENT TIDE.”

TO
SAMUEL HOWARD WHITBREAD, Esq., C.B.,
LORD LIEUTENANT OF BEDFORDSHIRE.
A CONSTANT VISITOR TO THE BANKS OF OUSE
IN ORDER TO SERVE ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION OF HIS FOREFATHERS
THE COUNTY AND COUNTY TOWN
WHEREBY IT FLOWS.

“HOUSE’S SILENT TIDE.”

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C. F. FARRAR.

1921

THE SIDNEY PRESS, BEDFORD.

THE CANOE SPEAKS.

On the great streams the ships may go
About men's business to and fro.
But I, the egg-shell pinnace, sleep
On crystal waters ankle-deep;
I, whose diminutive design,
Of sweeter cedar, pithier pine,
Is fashioned on so frail a mould,
A hand may launch, a hand withhold;
I, rather, with the leaping trout
Wind, among lilies, in and out;
I, the unmanned, inviolate,
Green, rustic rivers, navigate;
My dipping paddle scarcely shakes
The berry in the bramble-brakes;
Still forth on my green way I wend
Beside the cottage garden-end;
And by the nested angler fare,
And take the lovers unaware.
By willow wood and water-wheel
Speedily fleets my touching keel;
By all retired and shady spots,
Where prosper dim forget-me-nots;
By meadows where at afternoon
The growing maidens troop in June.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

INDEX.

		PAGE.
	PREFACE	vii.-xi.
CHAPTER I.	RIVERS IN GENERAL	I
II.	THE CHARM OF A RIVER	4
III.	THE OUSE IN GENERAL	9
IV.	THE CRADLE OF THE OUSE	15
V.	BRACKLEY TO BUCKINGHAM	19
VI.	BUCKINGHAM TO STONY STRATFORD	24
VII.	STONY STRATFORD TO OLNEY	30
VIII.	OLNEY TO BLETSOE	40
IX.	THE FALCON AT BLETSOE	47
X.	A VILLAGE CHAPEL BY THE OUSE	50
XI.	RADWELL TO BROMHAM	53
XII.	ANOTHER VILLAGE CHAPEL BY THE OUSE	61
XIII.	A GREAT LADY AT HER OUSE MANOR	65
XIV.	A LITERARY "SNAG" IN THE OUSE	70
XV.	A PRIORY BY THE OUSE	75
XVI.	MY OLD HOME BY THE OUSE	84
XVII.	BEDFORD BRIDGE	89
XVIII.	THE OUSE OF FIFTY YEARS AGO	93
XIX.	A NIGHT AT CAULDWELL PRIORY IN 1230	98
XX.	HOK TIDE BY THE OUSE IN 1230	108
XXI.	BEDFORD BRIDGE IN 1533	118
XXII.	AN ANTIQUARIAN AND A ROYAL PAIR ON THE OUSE IN 1541	125
XXIII.	THE ATTACK OF THE DANES ON BEDFORD IN 921... ..	132
XXIV.	WILLINGTON TO HUNTINGDON	138
XXV.	HUNTINGDON BY THE OUSE	145
XXVI.	HUNTINGDON TO ST. IVES	152
XXVII.	ON THE LOCK GATES AT EARITH	159
XXVIII.	THE OLD WEST RIVER AND WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR	166
XXIX.	THE LAST OF THE FEN	171
XXX.	THE PERVERSION OF THE OUSE	177
XXXI.	A TRIBUTARY OF THE OUSE	183
XXXII.	ON THE GATES OF DENVER SLUICE	191
XXXIII.	L'ENVOI	201

APPENDICES.

	PAGE.
1. DIALOGUE BETWEEN FATHER OUSE AND ST. MARY'S CHURCH TOWER, BEDFORD	203
2. THE AFFAIRS OF MR. MICAWBER	208
3. NAVIGATION OF THE OUSE TO BEDFORD	210
4. DOCKET OF THE EARL OF SUNDERLAND	212
5. INDENTURE OF CAULDWELL PRIORY	216
6. HOK TIDE	218
7. STREAMS AND RIVERS	219
8. THE KING'S DITCH, BEDFORD	220
9. THE SHRINE OF KING OFFA, BEDFORD	220
10. THE ISLAND OF ELBA, BEDFORD	221
11. THE POWTE'S COMPLAINT	222
12. A SWANNERY	223
13. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FENMAN AND MARSHLANDER	223

PREFACE.

“O H that mine enemy would write a book!” Job appears to have anticipated that such a literary effort would prove the desired instrument of his enemy’s downfall. If I possess an enemy I am about to satisfy his fond aspiration. Such an one I would humbly seek to propitiate and to disarm his criticism by a meek defence and excuse for this book. My first excuse must be that my birthplace was the Fens, where Father Ouse is a difficult and troublesome stream; that I was born in the early sixties in the heart of Fenland, with the fen ague, which still lingered there, and from which I suffered periodically in my youth, in my blood. Save for early infancy, I spent my boyhood at Cauldwell House, Bedford, on the immediate banks of the Ouse, the residence of my grandfather, John Howard, and with interruptions of some few years, I have continued to dwell hard by the river.

If I may borrow Washington Irving’s tribute of love for the River Hudson, I may say that the Ouse “is in a manner my first and last love, and after all my wanderings and seeming infidelities I return to it with a heartfelt preference for it over all the other rivers of the world.” Of its banks and haunts I may say with Horace:—

*Hic terrarum mihi
Praeter omnes angulus ridet.*

There linger in fond memory the long peerless summer days of school holidays, ere a sea-side change was deemed necessary for the health of children, when my Howard cousins, my brothers and I bathed and fished and boated where we listed in the Ouse, deeming a rare boat from Bedford a wanton intruder on our “ancient solitary reign,” knew its best roach and perch holes, its shallows and its depths, and wanted nothing else but to follow this glorious, half savage, amphibious existence of primitive man. As Calverley would have described us:—

“We did much as we chose to do
We’d never heard of Mrs. Grundy,
All the theology we knew
Was that we mightn’t play on Sunday.”

I have voyaged the Ouse from Bedford to the sea often, especially those portions which traverse the Fen—down the Hundred Foot to Denver Sluice and Lynn; up by Salters Lode, to Wisbech; by the Old West River—and up the Cam to Cambridge, and down the Ouse, past Ely, to Denver Sluice again. Several times I have voyaged up that beautiful tributary the Little Ouse, or Brandon Creek, to Brandon and Thetford; while in 1917 I passed above Thetford on water quite unfamiliar with the burden of a single craft, and tracked it higher, as I shall tell later, to its source, in the same marsh where the River Waveney rises. Lately, with Colonel Young and my son, I have voyaged from the source of the Ouse at Brackley, to Bedford, some 102 miles, a maiden voyage, as I can find no record of a voyage more extensive than one from Bedford to Buckingham, and a few from Newport

Pagnell to Bedford. Hence I can claim to know Father Ouse from his cradle to his grave, as also several of his progeny or tributary streams.

Bedford, the chief town on the Ouse, was, in my boyhood, a little market town of some thirteen thousand people, most of whom lived there because their fathers had lived there before them. It was famed for John Bunyan, John Howard the Philanthropist, Howard's ploughs, and Boys' Schools, and little else. Local tradition and sentiment was then far stronger than in these days of the cosmopolitan settler. As a boy I listened to the talk of ancient men, the City Fathers, as they recalled the bygone names and manners of an olden Bedford by the Ouse. They smoked long churchwardens, and used spittoons, and mixed hot from a cruet of brandy, rum, or gin, ere "Johnnie Walker" and all his tribe were known, and "so to bed," as Pepys has it, with in winter a warming pan, which, as Serjeant Buzfuz says, "is in itself a harmless, useful," and he would add, "a comforting article of domestic furniture," which from childish recollections I endorse. The churchwardens are long broken, spittoons, rum and gin bottles are banished from polite households, the warming pan now decorates the walls of our hall, along with hideous blue willow pattern crockery which these ancient worthies deemed mere "kitchen ware." I wonder why we moderns dignify and cherish what they held cheap and common, and treat as rubbish the things they held dear, the samplers, the antimacassars of many coloured stripes which my grandmother worked, the woollen mats, the corals and wax flowers under glass shades, the red curtains and mahogany what-nots. I wonder whose taste was best, theirs or ours, I am not sure—but I stray. These ancient men of my childhood in their turn may well have listened to those who knew the Bedford of Georgian days, as, for instance, my grandfather, born in 1791—possibly have talked with those who knew the Bedford of the last of the Stuarts. My great, great, great-grandmother, whose tombstone is in St. Paul's Churchyard, Bedford, was born in 1695, and died in 1773. If so, this penultimate generation knew a Bedford which would have changed little since the dissolution of the Monasteries, and must have retained many survivals of still more ancient days, for things moved slowly a century ago. The possibilities of such oral tradition are sometimes surprising. On the wall of All Saints' Church, Northampton, is the following tablet, the facts of which I was assured by the Churchwarden were well authenticated.

" Here under lyeth
John Bailes,
Borne in this Towne.
He was above 126 years old,
And had his hearing, sight and memory to ye last.
He lived in three centuries,
And was buried ye 14th of April, 1706."

He was born 23 years before the death of Elizabeth, and died in the reign of Anne.

My grandfather might well as a child have conversed with an old man who had in his youth known John Bailes, in which case but three lives would have served to pass a personal recollection of the Spanish Armada to the writer.

Similarly, in the Churchyard of Bromham—an Ouse village—a grave-stone erected by direction of Lord Trevor, runs thus

In memory
Of Joan Birt widow
Who was born at Biddenham
In this County in the year 1655, died in the Parish,
Aug. 2^d 1770.

Hence, if here and there, before it is too late, I may rescue from irremediable oblivion some local tradition and record of the past, this little book—" *hoc humile opus quantulumcunque* "—will have found its only apology.

Perhaps my best excuse for authorship is this. In 1921 Bedford will celebrate the 1,000th anniversary of a great event in its history—the expedition of the Danes up the Ouse from Huntingdon to attack Bedford, and their defeat by the Saxons, hard by the spot where our War Memorial will stand, which I shall record in due place. It is not every town which can boast an antiquity from whose womb is born a thousandth anniversary.

Naturally, I have dealt more fully with the course of the Ouse through Bedfordshire than through the other five counties which it traverses; for in the one I am a native—in the others "I am a stranger and a sojourner as all my fathers were."

I may plead one further excuse for writing of the Ouse. The Ouse Drainage Act of 1920 places under one authority the whole river, from its source at Brackley to King's Lynn. The newly-constituted Board will not merely supplant the 97 authorities which hitherto have supervised the lowlands of the Fen country and the course of the Ouse therein. It now assumes control of the river through Northants., Bucks., Beds., and Hunts., as well as the tributaries in Norfolk and Suffolk, which have known little or no control. Hence it may not be ill-timed to give some account of the Ouse, especially of its Fen course, where its history is one of acrimonious disputes, fierce rivalries of engineers and others, great law suits, and a running fire of bitter pamphlet warfare, to say nothing of several Acts of Parliament.

For my voyages I have searched mainly for my authorities such ancient writers as Leyland, Spede, Pennant, Camden, Lysons, etc. They were writers of "Itineraries" and "Magna Britannia's," a class of work long obsolete, before these days of motor touring, when we can visit in a day what took them painful weeks to accomplish. I have, of course, consulted many other works. Since Lysons in 1807, no writer, I believe, has given the Ouse as a whole much of a screed save the late Rev. A. J. Foster, who confesses that his boat was a "fairly bark," and of the Ouse *qua* river he knows but little, merely using it as a peg whereon to hang much interesting County and Ecclesiastical history. Of course, mighty tomes have been written as to the course of the Ouse through the Fens. Truth to say, my old friend the Ouse has fallen on evil days, and his name is rather moth-eaten and his reputation chipped. He reminds me of the embarrassments of Mr. Wilkins Micawber as pathetically described by Mrs. Micawber. "His difficulties," said Mrs. Micawber, "are almost overwhelming at present. . . He was a sort of traveller for miscellaneous houses, but made little or nothing out of it I fear." The same with you, Father Ouse; You were "a sort of traveller" when I first knew you, for the Ouse Navigation Company, "but made little or nothing out of it I fear," though you, like Mr. Micawber, were a deserving person. Now your barges are vanished, your tow paths bushed up, your sluices are rotting, and your bed encumbered with silt and weeds. Again to quote Mrs. M. "His affairs are rapidly coming to a crisis." A bailiff is about to take possession of the

person and goods of the Ouse, in the shape of an Ouse Drainage Scheme, the conditions of which in their original form were, in my humble opinion, very inequitable, and I am not sure that the Act has much rectified them. However, as Mrs. M. said, "I will never desert Mr. Micawber." I was subpoenaed to appear in Court (otherwise before a Parliamentary Committee) to speak as to the character and former life and conversation of the Ouse. No, "I will not desert him." Meanwhile, our local Micawber "is waiting for something to turn up."

I may add that Mr. Micawber was on one occasion actually in danger of being sold up. An advertisement was published in April, 1892, headed "The River Ouse Navigation," offering "In One Lot, the above valuable WATERWAY, about 31 miles in length, connecting the towns of Bedford, St. Neots, Huntingdon, and St. Ives with tidal waters, and traversing a thriving agricultural district, having numerous populous villages. There are 13 locks and 16 tolling places, also three freehold cottages and accommodation lands, the whole forming a very promising commercial investment."

The following is taken from the *Daily Telegraph*, of 6th April, 1892:—

"At Tokenhouse-yard they are in the habit of selling all manner of strange things, but perhaps one of the queerest 'lots' that has ever been offered for sale was that which failed to find a purchaser yesterday. This was nothing less than a navigable river. The Ouse, from St. Ives to Bedford, with all rights of levying tolls upon it, was the highly desirable property which lay at the mercy of the highest bidder. It was explained by the auctioneer that the aforesaid rights were of venerable antiquity, and confirmed by ancient Acts of Parliament. The only drawback to complete enjoyment was a sort of yearly quit rent of £5, payable to the Duke of Bedford. Yet, in spite of these undeniable attractions, a sum of only £5,200 was offered, and so the river had ultimately to undergo the singular humiliation of being 'bought in.' Probably no river has ever met such a fate before."

A lecture on "Ouse's Silent Tide," delivered by me to the Bedford Arts Club in 1910, was published by the Club in pamphlet form. I gave a second lecture in 1920 on the Little Ouse. I propose to incorporate portions of these two lectures in a more ambitious volume of the Ouse, including a description of the really charming upper and little-known reaches above Bedford. I have been greatly assisted by various old Bedfordians, to whom I refer as the "Ancient Mariners." They have searched their memories, pictures and relics of Bedford and the Ouse for my benefit. I gratefully acknowledge the help thus given.

I would wish to acknowledge to Mr. G. Langley his kind permission to publish, as a frontispiece, his charming picture of Bedford Bridge in the 17th century, of special interest as the Bridge of Bunyan's day. Mr. H. Thody has given me the benefit of his lifelong experience of the Ouse, and lent for this book some unique pictures of the banks of the Ouse. Mr. J. Hamson, of the *Bedfordshire Times*, is a mine of local history. I have gained much information and assistance from Mr. G. C. Walker, who possesses some rare books upon Bedford history.

Mr. Walter Henman has allowed me to use his unique collection of old maps and pictures of the Ouse, and reproduced a number for use in the book. The very interesting MS. document of the Earl of Sunderland, Secretary of State to James II., upon the Navigation of the Ouse, given in Appendix IV., is published by kind permission of Mr. W. Glassby.

Mr. H. W. Stewardson and Mr. E. M. Langley—both voyagers on the Ouse from Bedford seawards, have kindly lent me many photographs for reproduction.

Mr. Edwin Ransom reminded me of Dervorgilla de Balliol and her Ouse Manor, and has given me much assistance as to Ouse history in Bedfordshire.

The Rev. P. W. Wyatt has lent me the original conveyance, after grant by Henry VIII. of the site and buildings of Cauldwell Priory, which I print for the first time, as Appendix V. He has also given me the benefit of his local antiquarian knowledge, and that of his late father, Mr. James Wyatt. My cousin, Mr. Harold Howard, has motored me three times to the source of the Ouse to investigate and to photograph. He was the companion of my riverside boyhood, and of happy voyages Lynn-wards in those now distant days. Alderman Kilpin has given me the use of the original plan of the present Bedford Bridge, by John Wing; and allowed me to reproduce a water colour painting of the old Swan Inn and Bridge, which is unique. Mr. A. H. Allen is also one of those whose recollections of the Ouse at Bedford have been most valuable. All these, like myself, are old Bedfordians, who would not see the Ouse and its history left uncommemorated when Bedford reaches the 1,000th anniversary of the valiant deeds of our forefathers on the banks of Ouse Major. I gratefully acknowledge the kind permission of Mr. R. F. Grantham, M.I.C.E., to reproduce the original map of the Ouse Valley prepared by him for use of the Committee of the House of Commons. To this I have added names to illustrate my various voyages. Mr. Dawtry and Mr. Huckle, of Messrs. Howard's, Bedford, gave me valuable help in investigating the site and history of Cauldwell Priory, while Mr. A. Carmichael has given me much information on the Fens.

To avoid tiresome repetition of familiar historical facts I have ventured to give an imaginative setting to one of the Ouse monastic houses, Cauldwell Priory, to the period of the Siege of Bedford Castle and the Reformation era. Similarly an imaginary dialogue, given in Appendix I., serves to record some of the old traditions of the river at Bedford.

As I send the MSS. of this little book to the printer I am painfully conscious of its deficiencies save in one respect, its maps and pictures, wherein I have no share or credit. I am reminded how Carlyle, making a first call on Millais, at his fine mansion at Palace Gate, viewed the sumptuous interior and furniture with a supercilious air, and presently exclaimed in his gruff, rude way: "What! all from paint?" Millais bided his time, and as his guest was leaving quietly remarked, "By the way, what a reputation you've got, Carlyle, and all from ink!"

Should this little book meet with any humble measure of success, it will be "all from paint," and very little "from ink." So very humbly I borrow a great author's adieu to the child of his pen:

Go, little book and wish to all
Flowers in the garden, meat in the hall,
A bin of wine, a spice of wit,
A house with lawns enclosing it.
A living river by the door,
A nightingale in the sycamore.

—R. L. Stevenson.

May, 1920.

OUSE'S SILENT TIDE.

CHAPTER I.

RIVERS IN GENERAL.

"The river calmly flows
Through shining banks, through lonely glen
Where the owl shrieks, though ne'er the cheer of men
Has stirred its mute repose.
Still, if you would walk there,
You would go there again."

—ANON.

RIVERS have ever had a peculiar fascination for me. I think I must have inherited an atavistic strain from some distant forbear who hunted the great ox, and snared wild fowl and fish in the swamps and sluggish streams of the Fen, and drank strong waters to keep out the ague. Hence I start with a brief prelude on rivers in general.

Of all inanimate elements of nature, rivers are most like human beings, most human. They have nothing of the stern, overpowering, eternal immutability and impersonality of mountains which stand in awe-inspiring contrast to the ephemeral generations of man. Rivers, like ourselves, show a frail youth, an onward purpose, successes, failures, and ultimate enlargement in death. In the scale of the cosmogony the sea is immortal, rivers are mortal, and between the two "a great gulf is fixed" of repugnance. The life of a river ends where the tide reaches it. Where salt water meets it, it destroys the flowers, the denizens and the life of the river.

Some rivers find an instantaneous and splendid end. Straight from the hills they leap from some beetling crag, and they are one with the eternity of the ocean. Unstained by polluting cities, unploughed by boat or barge, they are types of human youth garnered by the heroic death of the battlefield.

But most rivers traverse youth and maturity only to reach a stage of lonely, decrepit senility. Grey ooze, mud flats, foul fleshy plants and floating scum—amid such baneful surroundings the river toils through baffling tides to its sombre death at the ocean bar. As Crabbe pictures the scene:

"Here samphire banks and salt wort bound the flood,
Here stakes and sea-weed withering on the mud,
And higher up a ridge of all things base
Which some strong tide has rolled upon the place."

It needs the pen of Dickens to limn, as in the "Old Curiosity Shop," the gruesome surroundings of Quilp's wharf side, the slimy piles, the mud and long rank grass of the dismal swamp where the dwarf's corpse is flung up by the estuary tide. Such is the graveside of the Ouse.

Lord Avebury ("Scenery of England") gives a more scientific definition of a river's three stages.

"The course of most rivers may be divided into three parts—(1) The torrent when it is excavating; (2) the river where it is neither excavating nor filling, but widening and levelling its valley; (3) the delta where it is depositing and filling up."

Again, the names of most rivers rank among the oldest elements of our language, even if they can be claimed as belonging to any known language. Many mountains bear prosaically modern names; but rivers, more ancient probably in the cosmogony than mountains, have rarely, if ever, suffered this indignity, or advertised the names of explorers and globe trotters. What philologist can fathom the origin of such names as Ouse, Thet, Thames, Avon, Nen, Wye? Dr. John Morris says that Ouse, Thames, and Avon are probably British, but with our scant knowledge it can be but conjecture, and it is at least equally probable that the Britons continued names long indigenous before them.

I suppose I must here pen a monograph on the name "Ouse"—root derivation and all appurtenances thereof. With regard to the name "Ouse," it is a philological problem which bristles with difficulties. I have searched philological writers, Skeat and Dyer, and antiquarians, Camden, Leyland, Spede, and many and divers authorities, and I candidly weary of the search; I have selected Lord Avebury, formerly Sir John Lubbock, as a person who really knew something about the history of rivers, and presumably he took far more pains than I am prepared to take in investigating their names. He may be right or he may be wrong, but it seems to me that he is as likely to be right as most other people who have tackled such problems as the name of the Ouse. Hence I quote you his conclusion on the matter, and then I have finished with it:

"Throughout Western Europe a large proportion of the river names fall into three groups:

"From the Celtic *uisage* or *oich* (water), Latin *aqua*, old German *aha*, softened into the French *eau*, we have the Aa, Awe, Au, Avon, Ouse, Oise, Oich, Ock, Aach, Esk, Usk, Uisk, etc.

"From the Celtic *dwr* (Greek *udor*), we have Oder, Adur, Thur, Dora, Douro, Doire, Durance, Dranse, Doveria, etc.

"From the Celtic *rhin* (or *rhedu*, to run, Greek *reo*), we have the Rhine, Rhone, Ruess, Reno, Rye, Ray, Raz, etc."

Accepting Lord Avebury's account of the name Ouse, it, of course, agrees with Dr. Morris's statement that "Ouse" is Celtic or British. But seeing that the Ouse possesses so many collateral name cousins, more or less removed, one searches vainly for some one common ancestor in whose eyes the Tower of Babel must have appeared a modern tenement. In other words, I advance the theory that British, Dane and Saxon (as also the ubiquitous Roman, who while changing town names, left river names alone) used these river names as they found them; and many river names, such as Ouse, probably reach back to some monosyllabic dialect of the Stone Age, and remain, like Stonehenge, among modern camps, monuments of far submerged tribes.

Our forefathers, with an appreciation of the "humanities" of rivers, personified them, and spoke of them as personalities, as Father Thames, etc., as I speak of Father Ouse. Rivers have one very human and virile quality, a propensity to prey upon their neighbours and filch their neighbour's goods,

lacking that nice distinction between meum and tuum which is so desirable in a well ordered community. For instance, Lord Avebury, in his "Scenery of England," considers that the Thames is probably an older river than the Severn and was formerly a much larger river than at present; that the original Severn, beginning as a small brook, gradually ate its way back, and annexing the rivers of western Wales cut them off from the Thames, and deprived it of most of its head waters. The dry valleys on the Downs and the Cotswolds, and their magnitude in comparison with the present volume of the streams flowing through them, go to support this theory.

Similarly, the Ouse, which is gradually approaching the head waters of the Cherwell (by the Claydon Brook, whose source now approaches within a mile of the Cherwell) threatens to carry off the upper half of the Cherwell area and detach it from the Thames and annex it to its own basin. Along the whole line of the Chikerns the Thames is gradually receding, while the tributaries of the Great Ouse are gaining ground. I am not a geologist, but I think, in the case of the little Ouse and the Waveney, which rise in the same marsh (see Chapter XXXI), we are witnessing two rivers at death grips with each other for the mastery of the watershed.

Dr. Morris's interesting "Local Antiquities" reminds me of another feature of rivers. There was much truth in that perspicacious old lady who remarked on the providential dispensation by which most large towns have a convenient river running through them. But some streams are hostile and repellant to man, just as others give him lodging, food, and free passage. For instance, the founders of London built their huts on the firm hill of the City, at the crossing to the Surrey Hills. But higher up, at Lambeth, and lower down, where the marshes have been scooped out into docks, they were long repelled by the ooze and fluctuating tides. Life sprang up to landward, and the Thames lies away from the main routes of London traffic. Higher up, eighty miles west, the young Thames, in its valley above Oxford, drives the villages far from its course, leaving wide, lonely meadowland and houseless banks.

If ever a river was markedly repellant to human habitation it is the Ouse, "the Bailiff of Bedford," as Fuller terms him, as the distrainer on hay and cattle and sheep, with its disastrous record of flood and destruction, as much so on a pocket-edition scale as the Indus. Specially is this the case in the upper reaches, where, with the exception of Buckingham, towns and villages almost invariably keep discreetly at a distance from its banks until Bedford.

The reason why its course, *contra naturam*, is fairly inhabited is that it was in ancient times a great military highway. It was once the boundary between Wessex and the Danelagh in Alfred's reign, from Bedford to Stony Stratford (see Chapter XXIII.). The crossings at Buckingham, Passenheim, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell and Bedford were held successively by Roman, Dane and Saxon; while from its estuary at Wisbech (not Lynn, as I shall tell), Danish Vikings and Corsairs found open way for their prow. Cambridge, St. Ives (the ancient Slepe), Huntingdon, and Bedford, anciently open villages, were fortified to block the highway of invasion. When I come to speak of the Danish Seaburgh of Willington, with its three dock basins, and of the Danish Camp of Cannock's Castle at Tempsford, I shall find just cause for a digression on the 1,000th anniversary of Bedford history to remind Bedfordians that theirs is "no mean city," and that the river on which they leisurely punt to-day has seen stirring days and not a few tragedies.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHARM OF A RIVER.

" Music of the bough that waves
As the wind plays lightly o'er ;
Music of the stream that laves
Pebbly marge or rocky shore,
Sweet your melody to me.
Singing to the soul, the tone
Exceeds by far the minstrelsy
Of halls wherein bright harpers shone."

—EDMESTON.

NOT few are the difficulties experienced in river voyaging, especially beyond the limits of ordinary navigation. In such parts riparian owners, millers, and riverside dwellers seldom greet one with open arms, and proffered hospitality. Why should they? Dr. Johnson remarks: "To discover a new country and to invade it has always been the same thing." As my canoe bursts obtrusively into their peaceful river solitudes I *am* an invader: I *mean* to push my way through. I sympathise with expostulating owners and suspicious millers. Their antipathy I hold to be an interesting evidence of innate atavism, a strain in the blood from distant forebears upon whom enemies stole by river. For centuries, as I mentioned in my last chapter, the river was the highway of marauding pirates. Burgesses of Bedford cast anxious eyes down stream to Tempsford, and breathless carls ran in to Buckingham, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Bedford, and Huntingdon bearing tidings of suspicious prowls on the move. At any moment the summons might come to take spear and target, arbalest and quarrel, broad sword or arquebuss, according to the fashion of the day, and to march to contest the passage of neighbouring bridge or ford. Can one be surprised that the voyager in riverine solitudes often gets a reception more suggestive of brickbats than of cakes and ale; is regarded as a possible poacher, a robber of ducks' nests, and in any case, as an objectionable intruder, who pulls up water-lilies, scatters the wrappings and debris of his meal on the bank, and argues riparian rights with the Lord of the Manor and "of all he surveys"? As I shall tell later, a voyage on the Little Ouse in 1917 brought me under suspicion of being an escaping German prisoner or a spy, and I am not surprised. About the same time three young men were arrested at Newport Pagnell on suspicion of seeking to evade the Military Service Act, by taking refuge in a canoe on the lonely reaches of the Ouse, and lying perdu in its osier beds, and were handed over to the Military Authorities.

Even the solitary fisherman eyes me askance, and seems to resent my enquiry as to sport; still more so, the wash of my craft, which has set his float bobbing and scared his fish. Isaac Walton is usually resentful of being asked of his catch when fish are not biting; and if they are biting why advertise the fact to these intrusive boaters, who may possibly produce rod and line, and proceed to poach your best baited swims.

I say nothing of the physical obstacles of the voyage, fallen trees, coagulated weeds, tedious porterages, low bridges, wire fences across the stream, all calculated to irritate the temper and elicit reprehensible language proverbially called "bargee."

But all these trials and difficulties pale before the obstacles which confront the voyager audacious enough to aspire to be the humble Boswell of the river, to interpret its voice and chronicle its habits and eccentricities for the benefit or the boredom of the public. The literary channel of such a Boswell is beset with snags. On his river the human element of the road which brightens a narrative is missing. "He that would travel for the entertainment of others should remember that the great object of remark is human nature." So thought the learned Doctor Johnson, but then Johnson was of the "street streety," and would have preferred "The Cheshire Cheese," in Fleet Street, to the Vale of Llangollen. To voyage the Ouse is to meet few gossips by the way. The sparse individual I meet is usually suspicious and taciturn, while the river inn is not a place where Mr. Pickwick and his friends would have encountered adventure and intrigue. Personally, I am content with such good old gossips as I encounter—Leyland, Spede, Pennant, Camden, and others, etc., despite they died long ago. Still I grant that from the aspect of human nature the river is a dull place. But, my motoring friend, you who traverse the populous high road, I do not envy your high estate. You hurtle along the high road with noise and dust and smell; the scenery flies by you like a stampeding film. You cast a condescending glance on nature—so much as advertising hoardings of petrol and tyres and benzol and garages permit you to see of her—as though she were some roadside beggar. And you have no ears, for every sound of the countryside is drowned in the roar of your motor. Not yours, as it is mine, to hear the call of the peewit, the honk of the swan, the plunge of the rising fish, the prattle of the stream through the rush beds, the whispering luliaby of the Lombardy poplar. What of the purr of your engine, so dear to you, compared with the singing ripple of wavelets of the stream breasting my boat bow?

My river is a silent, voiceless, impersonal, untrodden road. It steals into the scenery it traverses; it silently creates and adorns its vistas, and my passing there is noiseless and dustless, its only smell, as "the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." The very zephyr comes and goes not more gently and subtly than my stream. And I voyage as one privileged to see the country privately, freely, and at leisure—I have a private box for the play.

Dull, yes, I grant you, if you *must* live amid noise and chatter, but that is not my ideal of happiness. Charles Kingsley was once asked by an admiring lady what was his ideal of happiness. With that stutter which lent such charm and sudden point to his remarks, he replied: "To l-l-lie on m-m-my b-b-belly in the sun." What the lady's feelings and reply were I forget. To assume the same posture, especially on the banks of the Ouse, is my ideal of supreme happiness. And yet this very dullness of a river, which I admit, is the snaggiest of snags in the river bed of my little book, whereon the frail craft of my literary venture may be wrecked. The would-be Boswell, conscious that his theme lacks human interest, grabs at every church which stands on the bank, and rubs shoulders with every ancient family which ever lived within ten miles of the stream, to pad his page. He makes his river run church architecture, family genealogies, art, science, politics, religion, and, indeed, anything from "cabbages to sealing wax," save its own pellucid element. Thus does Thoreau, in

his "Voyage on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers," in 1839. The effect is disconcerting to the reader. As in imagination he floats placidly down stream in the author's boat he comes upon all these excrescences as upon snags in the river bed, jolting him from his thwart in a recurring mental "crab," until at last he wearily closes the book, with the resentful feeling that he has been bidden to a river party, and instead has dropped in for Extension Lectures. *Absit omen.* I shall be dull, but I will be "Ousy." A radius of a quarter of a mile from its banks shall be the limit of my literary vision. Though I discover the tomb and monument of an Oolite king or a Moabite stone upon the banks of Ouse, save it be within the prescribed limit I pass it by with averted head.

Candidly, I always feel bored at the recital of another's travels through regions unfamiliar to me. One cannot give one's eyes and ears to listener or reader. Nor can one make him partner in fancy of the joys of a river voyage on a peerless morning of summer. Nor yet lend him your nose when the scent of the bean field or the new mown hay mingles with that of sedge and rush and flag.

To me the early river on a summer morning, with the light mist wreathing off the water—presage of a glorious noon—has the spell of wizardry. The splash of the moorhen, the scutter of a wild duck, the flashing glory of the kingfisher, the gaudy dragonfly hovering on the wing, the scamper of fish off the shallows, the sudden swirl of a startled pike—I love these things passing well. The whisper of the breeze in the reeds, or the Lombardy poplar, the willows mirrored in still waters, the weeds at the bottom gently bending down stream shaken by the watery wind; innumerable water lilies and irises spreading like a tessellated pavement from each bank—all these things are an infinite joy to me. Or stop your boat and watch yonder water-rat munching his breakfast of reed stalk upon a lily leaf, ready to plunge if you raise a finger, or the little sedge warbler on the bending bulrush. And see there—those little black water beetles whom your paddle has scattered, how they are mustering again to foot their ceaseless rhythmic dance! And there in the mud sits a meditative frog, one toe grasping a bulrush, one eye on a heron flapping majestically overhead, ruminating this strange universe in which he plays his part. And here comes a shoal of silvery minnows, wheeling and advancing with the precision of a battalion, to fly in rout as they reach the sombre shadow of your canoe. Can I lend you my eyes for such a scene?

Or lean over the canoe side and look down into the pellucid depth and watch the little roach threading through the weedy coppices, nuzzling the pebbles for a meal. Or catch the mirrored surface at another angle, and see willow leaf and twig, each blade of grass, faithfully mirrored there, too faithfully indeed for art to imitate, for only nature may exaggerate herself. As Shelley has it:—

"Sweet views which in our world above
Can never well be seen,
Were imaged by the water's love
Of that fair forest green.

Let me plagiarise another's words for what I would but cannot express: "The shallowest still water is unfathomable. Wherever the skies are reflected, there is more than Atlantic depth, and no danger of running aground. . . . It requires a separate intention of the eye, a more free and abstract vision to see the reflected trees and skies than to see the river bottom merely; and so are

there manifold visions in the direction of every object, and even the most opaque reflect the heaven from their surface. Some men have their eyes naturally intended to the one, and some to the other."

"A man that looks in glass
On it may stay his eye,
And if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And the whole heaven espy."

Thank you, dear sir, for your quotation, it has a fair lesson of the spirit. If there are "sermons in stones," so are there in river pebbles, and such a sermon is yours. Would all sermons were as terse and to the point! Yes, my reader, I hope you can see with me the joyous scenes of the river side.

Even when the glowing picture is all wiped out, as though some clumsy hand had smeared the canvas; when rain and wind turn the river into a cold, cheerless, storm-vexed tract, and one paddles hard for shelter in some riverside inn, even then there is the joy of retrospection, and the genial anticipation of well-earned ham and eggs, and tea and pipe, while wet clothes steam before the fire, and you don the landlord's carpet slippers. Why do I prefer my canoe to your motor, my friend?

"Sir," said Doctor Johnson, "I have found you a reason, but I am not obliged to find you an understanding." I grant *all* you say that the river lacks human interest and incident.

But the smile of nature did not first appear when man first entered upon the earth, and I think she will still smile when he has vanished from it in the evolution of abysmal futurity.

No! my literary task is not as easy as Boswell's—just to note old Johnson's bon mots in the "Cock Tavern." I fear, friend Ouse, I shall never be your "Bozzie." At best I can but tell the simple record of my voyage down stream, and here and there break the monotonous rhythm of the paddle, to quote the quaint comments of old writers, who did their little best to rescue the Ouse from such oblivion as has overtaken it in these modern days, or to dream day-dreams of men and things who lived and chanced upon its banks in olden days.

I am too old any longer to brave camping out as I used to do. I can still in memory sense the joys of the camp fire, the fizzling chop and the tongue-biting Dutch cheese, the river gloaming, and the call of the corncrake or the nightjar. From the meadowland comes the plaintive wail of the plover, and then from a neighbouring spinney—listen—like the clear treble of a choir boy soaring in the anthem, comes the note of the nightingale . . . "warbling at eve when all the woods are still." And all the while, like a gentle undertone, the crooning sounds of the stream which lulled me to sleep on the banks, where—

"A murmuring winde much like the sounde
Of swarming bees did cast him in a swounde.
No other noyse nor peoples troublous crys,
As still are wont to annoy the wallèd towne
Might there be heard."

I have forsaken the more comfortable but cumbersome boat for the Canadian canoe, which has many advantages. Porterage is easy; it will pass the narrowest channels and float where water runs; above all, one faces the prospect.

No doubt the kneeling position of the Canadian boatman is best for power, but less sturdy mortals must sit. From long experience I advise sitting on a low hassock with foot stretcher, for which your bag will serve. It gives greater command of the paddle, and relieves the body strain, which is apt otherwise to be harmful. Last, but not least, it spares the painful attrition of the person on a boat thwart, while a paddle less readily blisters than an oar.

A canoe for two passengers is risky for sailing, and unmanageable for towing, as an unpremeditated dip in the Ouse taught me, especially now, when tow paths on the Ouse are almost obliterated. I suppose the time is at hand "when the years draw nigh" when these pleasant river haunts will remain for me but a memory, and when I shall echo the plaint of poor Rupert Brooke, who loved so well the witchery of streams.

"Oh! there the chestnuts summer through,
Beside the river make for you
A tunnel of green gloom and sleep
Deeply above, and green and deep
The stream mysterious glides beneath,
Green as a dream and deep as death.
Oh damn! I know it! and I know
How the May fields all golden show,
And when the day is young and sweet
Gild gloriously the bare feet
That run to bathe"—*Du lieber Gott.*

My son, to whom I shall refer as C.B., has been my good companion on various voyages. He is just that cheerful, willing, humorous soul who is so indispensable a berth mate in the narrow limit of a canoe, the bottom of which would be stove out by any "pernicketytness."

His duties aboard are threefold. He has photographed most of the illustrations of this book, and used his pen where the vast horizons of the fenland paralyze the camera. He has done the lion's share of the paddling, though I affect to ignore the fact. Last, and not least, he is the "Dangle," the impartial critic of my MSS. He objects to repeated quotations of Dr. Johnson—that I am "out-Johnsoning Johnson"—with four quotations from him already.

Well, I have been reading that inimitable book, "Boswell's Life of Johnson," to catch "the hang" of playing "Bozzie" to the Ouse, and my mind is rather like a shallow brook which shows the colour of the soil through which last it flowed.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUSE IN GENERAL.

"And still the river went on its way singing among the poplars, and making a green valley in the world. After a good woman and a good book and tobacco, there is nothing so good as a good river."

—R. L. STEVENSON.

IT must be confessed that the Ouse has not flowed to fame. It has inspired few poets, painters, or even snap-shotters. Turner, in his youth, made a sketch of the Ouse at Bedford Bridge, which receives from Ruskin (*Modern Painters* I., ii. 1), the following uncomplimentary critique:—"The England drawings are very unequal . . . others, as the Windsor from Eton, and the Eton College, and the Bedford Bridge, showing coarseness and conventionality."

Mr. G. Langley has a really charming picture of the same scene as it must have appeared in the 17th century, which, by his kind permission, appears as the frontispiece of this book. Some of you possibly, like myself, possess water-colours of various reaches of the river by members of a very talented family, the Fraser brothers, who were at Bedford School in the "'70's," the better specimens of which are really works of art. Even Cowper, though living on the banks of the Ouse at Olney, and earlier on at Huntingdon, drew little inspiration from it. Apart from a somewhat rubbishy little poem about his dog and a water-lily, and an anæmic stanza or two in the "Task," he makes scant reference to it.

There exists a gigantic epic called "Poly-Olbion," by Michael Drayton, in the 17th century, which deals with the Ouse, among other rivers, and conveys what I judge to be a mass of very inexact scientific information couched in the most execrable of verse. If you wish for a specimen of what an American would call his "worsification," you may find it heading Chapter VIII., as an awful example of how *not* to do it. In sooth the river flows from its source near Brackley to its bar at Lynn practically "unwept, unhonoured and unsung."

I propose to deal but little with the famous persons who have haunted its banks—the list is not long—nor with the churches, ruins and antiquities which dot its course. All these things are described to the full in the little handbook on the Ouse, previously referred to, by the late Vicar of Wootton. The Ouse celebrities seem to me as though they had got much of the fog and damp of the Ouse valley into their systems. They were mostly dour people, filled with stern and gloomy views of life, knowing little of the *joie de vivre*. As Mrs. Gamp would have said, "They was born in a wale and they lived in a wale, and they must take the consequences of sech a sitivation."

Look at poor, neurotic, dyspeptic Cowper, of whom Goldwin Smith remarks "That only the Christian Dispensation, with its care for the weakly, can account for the survival of such a type." His Olney Hymns are a precious

heritage, but a sequel to "John Gilpin" would have been worth much beside. And then that stark fanatic, Sir Everard Digby, pacing Digby's Walk by the Ouse in the garden at Gayhurst, pondering the gunpowder plot for the abolition of Parliament, plans which our modern spirit is apt to view with less horror than they inspired in our ancestors. Imagine that truculent Roundhead, the supposed original of Hudibras, Sir Samuel Luke, sallying out from Cople to wreck and sack the mansion of his neighbour, Sir Lewis Dyve, on the banks of the Ouse at Bromham.

John Bunyan was not exactly what Johnson called a "clubable person." But here, I bethink me, I must qualify my former statement that the Ouse "has not flowed to fame." "The Pilgrim's Progress" is reputed to be the most world-famed book in the English language, after the Bible, and therein, without gainsaying, the Immortal Dreamer of Elstow drew his picture of the "River of the Water of Life" from his native Ouse in summer array. "I saw there that they went on their way to a pleasant river. . . . Now their way lay just upon the bank of the river; here therefore Christian and his companion walked with great delight. . . . Besides, on the banks of the river on either side were green trees . . . and on either side of the river was also a meadow curiously beautified with lilies, and it was green all the year long." He needed but to walk a mile from his home to Kempston to find that same "pleasant river."

Again, take the frontispiece of this book, Bedford Bridge in the 17th century, a road often trodden by Bunyan. Imagine the scene, wrapped in the mirk of a winter afternoon, brooding over the swollen, discoloured flood of the Ouse, and it is the "River of Death." "Now I further saw that betwixt them and the gate was a river, and there was no bridge to go over; the river was very deep . . . but the men that went with them said, 'You must go through or you cannot come at the Gate.'"

Bunyan may have been an "unclubable man" in the eyes of that old cynic and taproom philosopher Johnson, but he wrote a book, "ære perennius," and the Ouse finds place therein, and so has a sacred lien with the destiny of the human soul, akin to the Jordan or

"Siloa's brook that flowed
Hard by the oracle of God,"

a river of imperishable associations. The "Delectable Mountains," so I dream, are over there on the north escarpment of the Ouse; the land of Beulah somewhere in the riverine plain of Bedfordshire; while "that very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain called 'Despond,'" was some queachy morass amid the osier and reed beds of the Ouse.

If for that and that alone the Ouse is not as other rivers are.

I might cite George Fox, the Quaker, whose Diary tells of visits at many Ouse side resorts, Newport Pagnell, Olney, Kempston, etc., and from Huntingdon all along its banks into the Fen. He seems to have given Bedford a wide berth always. Bunyan had no love for Quakers, and I presume that—

"From the further shore
Another lion gave a louder roar."

Further down stream, at Huntingdon and St. Ives, another "dour" personality meets us, lacking those qualities which Johnson deemed requisite for membership of his coterie at the "Cheshire Cheese" or the "Cock," in

Fleet Street, a great Ousite, "a very clamorous man," Oliver Cromwell, of whom more anon.

I can only recall one cheery, joyous, bonhomous soul in all its course—dear Samuel Pepys, a native of Brampton. We meet him at Bedford on the 8th June, 1668. The night before he had stayed at his father's house at Brampton (on the Ouse near Buckden), a name associated in later days with the peerage of Mr. Justice Hawkins, by the way, a schoolboy of "Bedford by the river." Unhappily, the rough notes of Samuel from the 8th June to the 17th, 1668, were written down on five leaves, loosely inserted in the Journal, several pages being left blank for the fair copy that he never made. There must have been some sort of domestic fracas on the 7th June, 1668, at Brampton; Mrs. Pepys seems to have been in a bad temper overnight—she had often good cause—and Pepys notes payment of fourteen shillings to his father's servants to solace them "for my wife's bad words." Samuel was not always delicate and judicious in his handling of domestic "situations." But the long-suffering Mrs. Pepys, Mr. Hewer, Captain Murford, and Mrs. Betsy Turner, afterwards wife of Sir George Mordaunt, with Willet, the maid, otherwise "Deb," started for a tour, riding pillion, I presume. Anyone familiar with the "Diary"—and did any man ever make such a candid revelation of his inmost thoughts, most shady deeds and secret vices as is there disclosed?—may judge that the company, as referred to elsewhere in the "Diary," was not altogether most suited to peace in the Pepysian menage—but this is not a chronique scandaleuse. How-be-it "through pleasant country to Bedford, where, while they stay, I ride through the town, and a good county town, and there drank one shilling." Had he written up his notes in full we should doubtless have heard that the shilling drink was at the Swan, and that from the side window Pepys viewed the Bridge, as you see it in my frontispiece, and looked down the willow-lined vista of the Ouse, "as fine a sight as ever I did see." And from the front window did espy "a mighty pretty wench of the country," to his great joy. The party journeyed by the valley of the river to Newport Pagnell and Buckingham, at which places he jots down his inn reckonings and makes comments, of which elsewhere in their place.

My critic C.B., scanning this MSS., remarks: "Of course, if we are going to talk Pepys, let us talk Pepys; and if we are going to voyage the Ouse let us voyage the Ouse, and pray get on." I reply that the study of Pepys, like the study of Dr. Johnson, is a liberal education. Yet there is something in the criticism. It is one of the amusing imbecilities of Mr. Dick that, do what he would, he could never manage to keep the head of King Charles out of his "Memorial." I seem liable to the same delusion as David Copperfield's friend—Pepys and Johnson, like King Charles' head, are always shoving themselves into my "Memorial."

By the way, one other bonhomous denizen of the Ouse, that most charming lovable, cheery soul, Charles James Fox, but we shall meet him twice on our Ouse voyage.

I claim one whole-hearted lover of the Ouse, Edward Fitzgerald, who gave the world the Rubaiyat of Omar-Khayyam. He haunted the Ouse side villages from Turvey to Goldington most summers from 1834 until 1859, when the death of his friend, William Kenworthy Browne, of Goldington Bury, saddened for him Bedfordshire memories, and he saw the Ouse no more. Him, too, we shall meet on our voyage down stream.

To come to our friend of the Embankment, really it is a river of such

little fame that I doubt if all who dwell on its banks know whether it is the Ouse, the Great Ouse, or the Little Ouse. It is the Great Ouse. Apart from the Yorkshire Ouse, there are Ouses at Bath and in Sussex of even less fame, while the Little Ouse, of which I shall tell later, is a tributary of the Great Ouse.

Yet, despite its lack of fame, I would remind you it is the fifth longest river in England, according to geographers. Personally, having traversed it myself from its source to its bar, which they probably have not done, I am prepared to uphold and contend against all comers that it is the *second longest*, and if mischievous persons had not meddled and diverted its course, it would have been the longest.

I recently sat in a Committee Room of the House of Commons (Ouse Drainage Scheme Order in Council) and heard learned counsel state that the Ouse was 147 miles in length. Certain "Ancient Mariners," who were fellow witnesses, alone prevented me violently contradicting him. Lysons, writing in 1806, says: "The circuitous course of the Ouse seems to have been much exaggerated. Fuller says that its course through the County of Bedfordshire (which is only 18 miles in width) is no less than eighty miles, and the Editor of the 'Magna Britannia,' states it to be ninety miles, but as it is described in Jefferies' map, which was made by a trigonometrical survey, its course does not appear to be more than forty-five miles." Wild ideas still exist as to its length through Bedfordshire. Jefferies is about correct with his 45 miles, which my figures make 47. But to the subject of the whole length of the Ouse I will return in Chapter XIV.

The Ouse, with its tributaries, the Claydon Brook and the Tow, in Northamptonshire, the Ousel or Lovat in Buckinghamshire, the Ivel in Bedfordshire, the Camb, Lark, Little Ouse, and Whissey, in Cambridgeshire, and the Nar in Norfolk, drains some 2,700 square miles. It has presented to many generations an insoluble engineering problem; has had untold wealth spent upon it, most of it wasted. It is not called "The Bailiff of Bedford" for nothing, for it has been destructive of life and property. In the early '70's I once saw the Ouse as the "Bailiff" in a high summer flood, when carcasses of oxen and sheep, haycocks and fencing and farm produce came down the stream.† The greatest floods of the Ouse which are recorded were in 1254 (see page 90), 1607 and 1823 (see page 56).

Camden, in his "Britannia," quotes the Reatines in Tacitus (I forget who they were, if I ever knew, and he does not give the reference), as saying: "That Nature has provided excellently for the convenience of mankind, in giving all rivers their mouths, and their courses, and their endings, as well as their

† A Pamphlet of 1607, entitled "A true report of certain wonderful Overflowings of Water in Somerset, Norfolk, and other parts of England, A.D., 1607," gives a description of how Bedford fared during the flood:—

"The fift of October about midnight, the Water overflowed so much, that men were faine to forsake their beds, and one woman drowned. There also were lost a great number of Sheepe, Oxen, Kine, Horse, and other Cattell. Amongst other there, one maister Cartwrite Gentleman, having his house inclosed round about, the water came in so much, that a Cart being lode with Thorns, did swim about the ground. He lost by the same flood, Sheepe and other cattell, to the value of an hundred pounds. The same gentleman had a close gate by the high wayes side, where the water ran over so extreemely, that at the fall thereof it make such a hole, that it was fortie feet deepe, so that no man could passe that way without great danger. To the filling up of the sayd Hole, or Pit was cast in by the men of the sayd Towne 25 loads of Faggots, and 20 load of Horse-dung, which sayd Faggots and Horse-dung filled not up the hole.

Also one master Lee, at the Freers in Bedford having fayre garde, wherein was great store of Elme-trees, whereof three score were bloune doune. Also he had a close of Conies that were cleane destroyed."

springs." I scarcely know what less Nature could have done, or what a river would have been like if Nature had failed to "provide them excellently" with these usual adjuncts of rivers. Howbeit, they were long-headed people, those Reatines. They at least knew that Nature was all wise. Not so our forefathers, who thought to go one better than Nature, and diverted the course of the Ouse from its original mouth at Wisbech to King's Lynn, and further dug an immense artificial channel for him from Earith to Lynn, whereby hangs a tale of woe—*Hinc illæ lacrimæ!* The river remains a solemn example of Mr. Squeer's axiom that "Nature is a rum'un," or of Horace's admonition that "You may drive out Nature with a pitchfork, but she will always return"; for these diversions of the river led to fatal results, of which later.

Expanding my former simile, I would compare the career of the Ouse to the stages of man's life—youth, manhood, and old age. Not seldom a man displays an innocent, guileless youth, a respectable, commonplace manhood, and then, whether from hereditary taint, some failure of moral fibre, or because he meets some untried and unfamiliar temptation, he breaks down suddenly and ends in dissolute and vicious old age and a prison. Such is the life history of the Ouse. There is his innocent youth, from his source at Brackley to Bedford. We catch charming glimpses of its course at Newport Pagnell and Olney, or as we lean over Harrold Bridge, or gaze at "Jonah" emerging from the water or the whale's belly—it is not obvious which—at Turvey Bridge. One instinctively recalls the "Brook" of Tennyson:

"I come from haunts of coot and hern,
Or slip between the ridges,
By twenty thorps, a little town,
And half a hundred bridges."

We will voyage this virgin stretch of river together presently, and see thorps, towns, and bridges.

Then comes his period of mature manhood between Bedford and St. Ives, the career of a decent, respectable, well-behaved river. Here he becomes one of the "*fluvie regales*," or "*haut streames de le Roy*"—a King's River—as declared navigable by various Acts of Parliament. This portion is, or was, the navigable part, though its traffic has now vanished. Yet I remember in the sixties when twenty barges would lie below Bedford Bridge with cargoes of wood for "Green's Wharf" or Hobson's Wharf, grain for Pigott's Brewery, bricks for extensions to Howard's Works and the Embankment, etc. Bargees, "full of strange cats, and bearded like the pard," drank their ale at the "Jolly Waterman," or the "Three Cups" at Waterloo, or at the "Boy and Oar," in Duck Mill Lane. This was the day of Ouse's busy commercial manhood, as it had been for many a century back to Norman days, and probably long before, save when Danish Vikings spoiled the trade.

Here, too, we will take canoe for St. Ives. I have voyaged this portion of the river so often that my narrative will be a "compote" of my many experiences extending from boyhood to this year of grace.

And then the old age of the Ouse. Beyond St. Ives the Fen banks begin gradually to contain the river and shut out your view. Towing becomes possible in parts, save where the neglected towing paths are interrupted by pollarded willows. And so on to Earith, at the start of the Hundred Foot, a weary little Fen village, but yet not devoid of fame, for what Fenman but knew the

"Hermitage Inn" at Earith—dear haunt of my youth—now, alas, improved away. It is here the river leaves behind all semblance of respectability and drops into a vicious senility. You will need courage to voyage beyond Earith with me, for it is a weary land "where it is ever afternoon." At least you will think so if you are no Fenman. I warn you of mud banks and matted weeds and endless reaches of dirty water, save from Ely to Denver Sluice, which is weary and endless, but not dirty. I shall prate you deaf and silly of Francis, Earl of Bedford, and William, his son, of Cornelius Vermuyden, of one "Collonel" William Dodson, of the "Commissioners of Sewers," of the "Undertakers," and of the "Adventurers," and of "Lynn Law." I shall have speech with you of "droves" and drains, and dykes and "leames" and "lodes" and "eas" and sluices and "sasses" and "aprons," whatever these last two technical terms of Fen drainage may mean, and I really am not quite sure myself, until at last you grow picksome and quarrel with me. And yet there are joys even there if you know how to take them not too sadly. I will schedule them for you presently. Of course, if, as you say, "you prefer to go and play golf at Hunstanton instead," perhaps you are right, and Providence watches over me. In that case look out of the railway carriage window at Littleport and you will see the Ouse in the heart of the Fen—perhaps espy me in my canoe *en route* for Denver, but don't go home and boast that you know the Fen, for you don't—and no man does.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRADLE OF THE OUSE.

THE FOUNTAIN.

"No check, no stay, this Streamlet fears;
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.
And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot choose but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.
My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard."

—WORDSWORTH.

PROJECTING a voyage from the earliest navigable point of the Ouse, near Brackley, to Bedford, a voyage not on record before, I motored with my cousin, Mr. Harold Howard, of Kempston Grange, to Brackley, in April, 1920. By good fortune the river was in flood, and so from Stony Stratford, through Buckingham to Brackley, I was seldom out of sight of the river, as it meandered, now near, now far, from the road in the meadowland, and so I was able to judge its unexplored course. Some three miles on the road from Brackley to Farthinghoe we crossed a low bridge in a dip of the road, turned into a field on the left, and there skirting a low hill, was a tiny brook forcing its way through brambles and last year's withered reeds. We tracked it up a hundred yards, and there, gushing up in gouts of water from below the bank, came the infant Ouse, like a baby uttering its first whimper and blinking at the sunlight. I stood, as you see me in the picture, and meditated the sight of how "from little things do great things grow." I saw in imagination the long river stretches familiar to me from boyhood, the churning mills, the oprosing staunches, a vast waste of water, a flood of forty thousand acres in the Southery Fen, the last battle struggle with the sea tide of the Hundred Foot, and at last the weary death of Ouse at Lynn.

An epitome of life, its joyous start, its feverish energy, its labours, its disappointments, its mistakes, its passions, and then the irremediable end. I cross the road, for the trickle forces its way beneath a hidden culvert, and I watch the start of this happy, careless, chattering child.

I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingley bars;
I loiter round my cresses;
I steal by lawns and grassy plots,
I slide by hazel covers;
I move the sweet forget-me-nots
That grow for happy lovers.

And out again I curve and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

Yes, flow on, happy brook; you and I will meet again and journey together as often before, and talk of men and things you have known and seen in that life of yours which began when the world was young, and which this afternoon is young as a new-born babe when the world grows old. I feel almost a father's pride and delight in his firstborn, in this baby brook.

As I return to Brackley I see my little one frisking like a lamb, in low meadows on my right. Owing to the flatness of the ground the stream describes the most freakish contortions, winding back upon itself, knotting and unknotting its coils, like "Quaint mazes on the wanton green." And then, as he nears Brackley, he makes up his mind to smooth his hair and brush his pinafore, and walk sedately as a well-behaved brooklet should, for is he not approaching his first "little town," and the first of his "half a hundred bridges"? And this, his first bridge, is not at all a nice bridge; it is like that fearsome arch, of which I tell later, into which once vanished a Stygian tide at Bedford—dread of my childhood. So here at Brackley a noisome archway preludes a dark tunnel under the Gas Works. Thus early begin the troubles of life for my infant Ouse; but he is a good, plucky child, he *won't* be frightened, and into the dark archway he goes, and fifty yards beyond out he comes, shouting gaily, "I wasn't frightened one little bit," and goes his way well pleased, as you see him in my picture, just below Brackley Bridge, still nothing but a shallow brawling brook, even in flood time, as it is this day. I visit a friendly signalman at the station, one Mr. Dawes, and advise him that on May 21st, 1920, will arrive, to care of stationmaster, a canoe, four paddles, cushions and hassocks, and I bid him dandle the former like a child in arms, for it is frail and brittle; have a horse and float ready by my train from Bedford, and John Bradbury shall reward him. To lunch at the sign of "The Crown," in Brackley, and then to explore the place of starting. We had crossed close east of Brackley a bridge in a dip of the road near the great viaduct of the Great Central Railway, and I had noted a brawling brook there. Thither I repaired and sought local information as to Brackley and its appurtenances from urchins on the bridge. They did not know how in A.D. 1215 the Barons had assembled at Brackley with Magna Charta, fresh and clerkly written in their pockets, to swear blood oath to round up King John at Runnymede; nor yet of Simon de Montfort in like contumacious mood there long ago. But they did know that this brook was the "Mill Brook," and that it joined the "Ouse Brook" half a mile below Brackley, and they thought my boat, "if it warn't a big 'un," would float all along Evenley Park.

After all, what is education for, unless to fit one to impart portable, marketable, cashable information, and this the urchins possessed and marketed accordingly for sixpence? So be it, the die is cast, there at the Mill Brook my bark shall start its adventurous voyage.

Subsequently, at tea at the "Crown," a fellow tea drinker, overhearing our Ouse conversation, suggests I should visit Mr. Green, of Brackley, who was an authority on all local Ouse matters. I pay the visit, and introduce myself as an embryonic author about to immortalise the Ouse, recently a witness upon the

Ouse Drainage Scheme before a Parliamentary Committee, the champion of Brackleyites and Ousites generally against oppression. With credentials as

“ Some village Hampden who, with dauntless breast,
The little tyrants of his Ouse withstood.”

I am welcome. As I supposed, *pace* the ancient Camden, who states that the Mill Brook coming from Bittlesdon, in the north, is the source of the Ouse, followed by various misguided makers of maps, it had never been so regarded locally. My gushing spring at Farthinghoe, the furthest western point, was the true source and had always been the Ouse Brook. Mr. Green was a fisherman, and knew all the waterways; that higher up the Mill Brook fine trout running up to 3 lbs. rose well to the fly; he knew the lairs of two pairs of otters near at hand, and followed the Buckingham Otter Hounds, who hunt hereabouts from March until the hay season. As to distances by river, the spring at Farthinghoe was $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Brackley, as the crow flies, but “ more meandrous than Meander,” as old Fuller describes the Ouse, its course was seven miles to Brackley. A safe rule for measuring the river distances hereabouts was to double the road distance, and add a very substantial margin (but this calculation will not do for Bedfordshire, where you may vastly increase the ratio). “ To Buckingham? Eight miles by road, and a long and arduous twenty miles by river.” I airily suggested that I hoped to lift the landfall of Stony Stratford the first evening. He shook his head. He hoped I should see Buckingham my first night, but it was not a water promenade, and for a man of my years—well —. I hastened to inform him that I was a long practised waterman and my grey hairs possibly belied my vigour in a boat.

Returning to finish my tea, I discussed with my cousin, who had been my companion on several Norway fishing trips, the possibility of casting a fly over these trout in the Mill Brook. I was somewhat taken aback when a neighbouring tea drinker rather truculently suggested that I should do well first to ask his permission, as he was the owner of the fishing. The soft answer which turneth away wrath failed to elicit the desired invitation. I have already quoted Dr. Johnson that “ to explore a new country and to invade it has ever been the same thing,” and here was my true Ousite ready, and rightly so, to repel the invader. And here I would say that during the whole of my five days’ voyage from Brackley to Bedford I met with nothing but courtesy and kindness from these bank-dwellers, whose solitude I invaded. I have no socialistic ideas as to riparian rights. The riparian owners own the land of the bed of the river, and the latter is merely water overflowing their property. The Ouse in these parts is not “ a King’s River ”; the private rights of bank owners are defined in law, the river is their private road, and certain penalties of law are laid upon them, though evidently not enforced, “ as to allowing obstacles to impede the current,” but plain trespasser and invader I am. The legal phrase, “ *Cujus est solum ejus usque ad cælum*,” defines riparian rights. It is all very well to gaze enviously at his river preserve when it smiles under a summer sky and call him a curmudgeon because he is not prepared to declare it a high road. But winter comes and floods come, and banks are damaged and property often lost, and he will tell you it is not all “ cakes and ale ” to have a river running over his soil, which the river bed is, and to reckon the cost of a high winter flood. I have ever had a respect for my neighbour’s landmark, even if it stands in the path of my canoe. Through the earlier portions of the voyage the few persons

who sighted us were too astonished, to see a craft pass where none had ever passed before in living memory, to say much, and I fell at once upon the subject of the Ouse Drainage Scheme, and soothed anxious hearts of millers who heard rumours of dread things coming to pass to disturb their rights and their "ancient solitary reign." I fear I exaggerated the part I had taken recently in the enquiry. Possibly a local tradition will arise that Lloyd George once canoed down the Ouse to investigate at first hand the merits of the scheme.

A few days before my start I received a visit from Colonel Young, the late C.R.E. of the Bedford District during the war, to ask to accompany the voyage in his own canoe. He proved himself a hardy pioneer, an excellent waterman, and a most cheery and companionable fellow voyager. He served also the useful purpose of representing the "Public," to curb an author's exuberant imagination, and to enforce veracity in my book that—

"I nothing extenuate,
Or set down ought in malice."

Besides, on the vexed question of river distances, he calculated with military precision, deducting for porterages, meals, photographing, etc., estimating rate of progress, and so finally establishing, in face of repeated and wrong-headed official estimates of 147 miles, that from Brackley to Bedford alone is 102 miles, and hence the total length of the river some 188 miles at least. We agreed that he should take the two canoes, etc., by rail, the day before, Thursday, May 20th, 1920, and make sure of the best starting place, for I had my doubts as to the accuracy of "the urchins," and had had no time to verify it.

C.B. and I soon pack our kit—to wit, two small portmanteaux, and one for my books of reference on the voyage, for what is an author without his tools?

At Brackley Station the Colonel, with the faithful Mr. Dawes, greets us, the canoes on a cart start, soon followed by a crowd of wondering and half-derisive Brackleyites, and soon we are afloat upon the Ouse, not on the Mill Brook, where sewage drains, but lower at Evenley, where my picture shows. It is a solemn moment. I feel like Christopher Columbus must have felt as the good barque "Maria" went out on the ebb from Palos at sunset on Friday, 7th August, 1492.

The unknown Ouse lies before us; the mysterious beckons us on. More serious still, before me lie the perilous waves of Literature. Foolishly, I have confided to one or two Ancient Mariners, whose local knowledge I have tapped, that I intend to write a book on the Ouse! they "will, of course, not mention it to anybody." The world at once knows it; I am already looked upon as an author. The book must now positively be written; I cannot, without ridicule, retreat. But how written? The prospect is far more alarming now than when I airily planned the miserable work. My boats are burned behind me. I feel like the two bachelor brothers in Besant and Rice, who were always going to write a great epic; creamy folio paper, pens, ink, blotting paper, each morning lay ready at hand. They smoked their after-breakfast pipes, and spread out the creamy folios, but first a little morning stroll for local colour, a little nap after lunch; they were somewhat too fatigued in the evening, and . . . I am somehow haunted by thoughts of that "creamy folio paper."

"Who buildeth a tower, and sitteth not down first and counteth the cost?"

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST DAY'S VOYAGE. BRACKLEY TO BUCKINGHAM.

"The boatman strait
Held on his course with stayéd steadfastnesse
Ne ever shronke, ne ever sought to bayt
His tryéd armes, for toilsome wearinesse,
But with his oares did sweep the watery wildernesses."

—SPENSER.

THE Whitsuntide of 1920 has a record for five peerless days of summer, the last evening only broken by a fleeting thunderstorm soon to resume the beauty and peace of perfect eveningtide. Such was the weather of our voyage. The country side was decked in all the pomp and glory of early summer; every shade of spring's new verdure; great bridal veils of hawthorn in full bloom, here and there relieved by the dark background of copper beeches, while the meadows were ablaze with buttercups, as Tennyson writes:—

"Which dazzled all and shone far off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold."

There are two trees almost continuous denizens of the banks of Ouse, the willow and the Lombardy poplar. Our forefathers, who valued river ways, no doubt planted the long avenues of willows to revet the banks, and we let them decay and plant no more. When pollarded they are rather piteous objects, as Dr. Johnson said, "Like Nature throwing up signals of distress," but in full branch and leaf of green-grey they are trees of beauty. In old age they assume quaint, fantastic shapes, like goblins and spectres, until at length some high flood sweeps them to a watery grave.

The Lombardy poplar is a lofty, graceful, clean limbed tree, with a voice all its own. In the softest breeze there is the gentle *susurrus* or whisper of its leaves. If Virgil sang his *Bucolics*, "*recubans sub tegmine fagi*," reclining under the shadow of a beech tree, give me the banks of Ouse and the gentle lullaby of the Lombardy poplar for my siesta. It stirred Cowper's regret when an Ouse spinney of them fell to the axe:—

"The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade,
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
Nor Ouse in his bosom their image receives."

You see in the picture our starting point. All things seem to smile; the sun shines, the stream runs merrily, hawthorn bushes deck the banks; I confidently re-issue orders for the fleet to make Stony Stratford, as we bowl under a long tunnel of the Great Central Railway, which the picture shows. By the way, the railway is like a big bully dominating a little schoolboy. It has usurped the rights and the utilities of river ways, has hidden their beauty from the public eye, and left them neglected and forlorn, like Scott's old minstrel.

Great men and fair women in bygone days rode over the river bridges or urged their steeds across the fords, and coaches passed thereby with merry blast of the horn. The folk of to-day are swept over hideous viaducts in express trains or hurtle across in motor cars, with no time to do more than curse the steep gradient and narrow passage way of some bridge, which was built when Plantagenets ruled the land. But the river takes its revenge. From afar it jeers the railways, "You have bullied and ill-used me, but I will pay you back and cost you dear." In our voyage to Buckingham the Ouse had cost the Great Central Railway this vast viaduct, and the London and North-Western has to bridge it six times, and bridge it not for this puny summer brooklet, but for the wild welter of a winter's far cast flood.

But I wander from the voyage. Mr. Green soon proved a true prophet, for ere long the scene changed; we ran into a sort of tropical mangrove swamp. Trees grew in the stream or laid themselves flat across it from bank to bank; the hawthorn bushes overhanging the banks turned into vixenish hussies who scratched us and tore our shirts, and smacked us in the face like vulgar hoydens. Trees bumped us on the head and prodded branches into our eyes. C.B. would stand up in the bow and attempt to edge through by grasping the branches and pulling, bidding me mind my head in the stern when the branches switched back behind him. The stern is a bad seat at such times, where you get the recoil of every branch: You care nothing about your head when a willow stump has hit you violently in the stomach, and, as the canoe suddenly lurches forward with the current, threatens to disembowel you. The Colonel suggests that a tin trench hat is the proper head-dress for this sort of voyage; before long I would have gladly donned a complete set of armour with a vizored helmet. Momentarily we were threatened with the fate of Absalom, and a stretch of "Absaloming" became a catch phrase of the day. And here the Colonel proved himself a pioneer, for from his knapsack he produced a hefty billhook. Without this there were places we should never have got through, for shut in by bushes portage was impossible, and we hacked and hewed our way through like Stanley in his Central African forest. Added to these difficulties was the perpetual risk of submerged snags threatening a jagged hole in the bottom and shipwreck. Though I perish the notes of this voyage shall survive, and I secure my wallet containing my precious Spede and my notes with straps. The Colonel issues whistles to the fleet, and instructs us in the three long and three short blasts of the S.O.S., and signals if separated in the wandering bycourses of the river. We were destined to see a jagged hole, to hear the S.O.S., and bewail unstrapped chattels before the voyage ended. Meanwhile, we lurched forward over sunken perils dangerous as derelicts in the ocean. Of course there were pleasant stretches where the stream wound backwards and forwards through lonely meadow land, where we made good headway. The strange thing was the utter absence of river life, for there was not a duck, a moorhen, or a bird of any description; not even a rat visited this lonely land. It was curious to note the behaviour of grazing animals on the bank, for they had never seen such a sight as a boat, nor has any human being, for that matter, ever floated a boat in this stretch to Buckingham, save perchance some oolite man in his dug-out. Horses would stand on the bank with outstretched forelegs, ears agog, and nostrils blowing, and gaze at us in dumb amazement, and never cease to gaze until we were out of sight. Oxen were differently affected; whole herds rushed to the banks, and then, with tails in the air, accompanied us in a wild, excited gallop, halt a hundred yards ahead, await us, watch us pass, and then the

same mad hilarious stampede until they reached the fence, where they vainly tried to push through. Sheep, on the other hand (and Northants. is famed for its flocks) viewed us differently. Solemn, black-faced ewes, who looked like hideous negresses, gazed on us frankly shocked and scandalised, as though at an exhibition of human indelicacy. They seemed to be saying to their lambs, "Look the other way *at once*; young people should not witness such impudicity, do you hear?"

In a short rest from our labours I pluck out my beloved Spede. After telling how "the pastures and woods are filled with cattle, and everywhere sheepe loaden with their fleeces of wooll," he adds, "notwithstanding the simple and gentle sheepe, of all creatures the most harmless, are now become so ravenous that they begin to devoure men, waste fields, and depopulate houses if not whole Towneships." I glance nervously at these solemn-faced disapproving ewes. The vision of being attacked and possibly devoured by flocks of mad "tups" is frightful! But, really, my dear Master Spede, I hold you as an Itinerist and Antiquarian in the highest respect, and I can stomach much, but indeed that is too tall a story. Surely you must have dined overnight at "Ye Signe of ye Crowne" at Brackley, and "mine host" must have pulled your leg, or the mulled sack or bottle of hippocras or canary must have been fiery, and you mixed up an attack of the Danes with a sheep show. I cannot continue to quote you in a modest and truthful book such as mine will be (if I ever write it) if you give any more such screeds of a "Cock and a Bull," let alone of sheep.

Once a solitary farmer strolled down to the banks, falked fish; asked for news of the far-away outer world, and "What of that there Drainage Bill?" He shook his head over our getting to "Bookingham" that night. At last we come to where Ouse begins its first useful toil of turning a mill, Westbury Mill. The lonely river mills, which once played so great a part in the life of our forefathers, as Domesday Book shows, are now going to decay and are often deserted ruins. I suppose stone-ground wheat, which retains the coarse but feeding qualities of grain, is repudiated by our modern fastidious tastes. Once the mill ground the villagers' corn, and the river, which Bacon describes as "the richest mine above ground," fed them with fish, and fetched and carried for them. Now they are of "the things gone to decay," and the "Jolly Miller of the Dee," and of the Ouse, is passing away, as has passed the pedlar and the rushman who used, in my boyhood, to call and reseat our chairs with the rushes of the Ouse. Sad that our civilisation must jettison so much that is beautiful and picturesque. I would love to live an idle summer in one of these mills, whose wheel churned merrily in far distant days. To hear the eternal croon of its flowing water; to gather the catch of its eel traps; to ply rod and line in the mill race; to bathe in the still pools and then as the sun westerns in a land where "it is ever afternoon," to nod over my book in the osier bed and slumber to the lullaby of the Lombardy poplar. Give me such a summer retreat and you are welcome to your "yellow sands," your crowded, extortionate sea-side hotel, or stuffy "apartments," your blaring bands and comic minstrels, and all that appertains to "New Beverley-on-Sea." Tennyson breathes the charm of the Old Mill in "The Miller's Daughter":

"How dear to me in youth, my love,
Was everything about the mill;
The black and silent pool above
The pool beneath that ne'er stood still.

“ I loved from off the bridge to hear
 The rushing sound the water made,
 And see the fish that everywhere
 In the back current glanced and played.”

The spillway of Westbury Mill was a steep overshot and a fast running stream below, which looked tempting, and there, to our cost, we decided on portage. Alas, we were destined to court pains and nearly disaster. Launched below the fall the canoe hung for a moment on a shallow ridge, and then we were suddenly hurled helplessly forward by the current; flung through brambles, bumped on the head, thumped in the back, switched in the face by maytrees and smacked by willow branches, until flung on a bank 40 yards below. It was like a bad minute in the middle of a furious footer scrum. The crash of branches behind, and the Colonel with bleeding nose was hurled beside us. I was furious and gibbering with anger. Hat and pipe were gone, my arms and neck were bleeding, my shirt torn, while some brutal thieving bush had annexed a mackintosh sheet. The laughter of C.B. was as oil to the flame. “ Verily,” says the Psalmist, “ the laughter of fools is as the crackling of thorns under a pot.” To ask me if I had any thorns in me! I am stuck full as a pincushion where stakes have not impaled me. Let the Psalmist talk elsewhere of ploughers “ who did plough long furrows on his back.” A frivolous, querulous complaint! I have been ploughed and harrowed and scarified all over. I sat and mended my wounds with cold cream, felt for scalp wounds, and assured myself my teeth were still there. Presently my hat and pipe, to my relief, appear paddling out of that fearsome jungle. The canoe was filthy, and piled up like a faggot yard. Recently I wrote of the Ouse as a prattling child, and here was a rough, bad-mannered lout of a schoolboy, playing beastly booby-traps on me. I no longer see any rhythm or beauty in Tennyson’s line about “ brambly wildernesses”; he evidently had never canoed from Brackley to Buckingham, or he would not have written it! Nor do I any longer see charm in those spiteful may bushes. “ No, Master Ouse, I came kindly to visit you at school, prepared to tip you at the tuck shop, and carry home good report of your behaviour and demeanour and ‘ progress made,’ but not if this sort of thing is to go on. I am seriously offended!” But the sun shines, and again Ouse smiles and beckons us on. We come upon two lonely little villages, well back from the banks—Mixbury on the right bank and Fulwell on the left, connected with a long wooden flood bridge. Four small natives gather amazed upon the bank, and question me eagerly. They had never been further than Mixbury and Fulwell—of the outer world they knew nought, and as for a boat, well they had seen “ pixures ” of one at school. When I presented them with a shilling they thanked me, but fled incontinently, and afar I saw two anxious dames, evidently in doubt as to what manner of men these were, and whether the shilling was a kind of 30 pieces of silver, the price of some youthful Joseph whom we Midianites purposed to carry down into Egypt. At the second of the four mills, Tingwick, a kindly miller, with bee net round his head, for he was an apiarist, regaled us on refreshing milk, while his buxom dame evidently welcomed a gossip with strangers in that lonely spot. Huge flitches of bacon hung where we usually hang pictures, while for some ancient brass utensils I would dearly have liked to bid her many shekels. I have spoken of willow trees. Hereabouts they grow to enormous sizes. They looked as though they were young when Edward the Elder led his Saxon armies about these parts a thousand years ago; they had grown gnarled and contorted and spectrally

weird. One of them had an almost perfect outline of some hideous leering devil. So Shelley pictures them:

" The giants of the waste,
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude
As serpents interlaced."

By now the day is waning, and our map showed we should be nearing "Bookingham," but its landfall is an *ignis fatuus*. This day cost us four mill portrages, two impassable bridges, and *fifteen* obstacle portrages, an unholy record. We come at last to Radcliffe Mill, and our day seemed nearly done, but again Ouse became a hooligan. We ought to reach "Bookingham" by 9 p.m., and it is now 7 p.m. We question a melancholy man on the bank. I shall have more to say of Ouse bank informants later. How far "Bookingham?" "'Bout a mile." We meant to get there by 9 o'clock, did we? Did we mean 9 that night, or 9 next mornin', because he reckoned it 'ud be 9 next mornin'. Somewhat daunted, and with courage "oozing out of our finger tips," we enquired if there were a public house at Radcliffe, or a cart and horse to drive into "Bookingham." "No, there warn't no pub, and there warn't no 'orse nor kyart. There was nowt at Radcliffe, save this blarmed mill as didn't goo."

Alas, he had told the truth. We struggled and hacked with the bill-hook through a desperate mangrove swamp, within sight of golfers on the local links, cheered or derided by caddies. Another hour of bitter struggle, and we touch Buckingham outskirts, portrage its mill, wind slowly through its three bridges, round three sides of the town, lift barbed wire, which fenced the stream below private gardens, and at last cast ourselves wearily on the riverside causeway of the White Horse Hotel. We were all exhausted by 12 hours of battle, but we had done what no mortal boat had ever attempted, and I love to break a record, though it be but to teach a beetle to sit up on its hind legs and beg. It is an Englishman's high pride to accomplish such feats of "derring do." "Where is the benefit?" Don't ask such stupid utilitarian questions: it betrays a low, grovelling mind.

Over cold beef and ham ("Bookingham" only provides 'against "Market Day," which this happeneth not to be), the Colonel pens this concise military report. "To accomplish this voyage, required two robust young men, a canoe not over 12 feet, and no luggage beyond a toothbrush. Time. Spring-time, before the rushes grow, and after flood. Outfit should include a double-handed saw and axes. Distance—a very severe 20 miles; should be calculated for labour 40 miles." I suggested the addition of an accident and life insurance policy, and a duplicate set of teeth, to be included in the outfit. "And so to bed," as Pepys has it.

Clothes, person, everything, to my shaving soap, gives forth the peculiar smell of Ouse, a mixture of mud, sedge, rush, duckweed, and other ingredients, yet sweet to my nostrils.

" To smell the thrilling, sweet and rotten,
Unforgettable, unforgotten,
River smell,"

as Rupert Brooke defined it. It is gently flavoured on this occasion with a soupcon of cold cream. Nothing will rid me of it save a Turkish bath some week hence, but it has a "sweet savour," and perchance I border on age when I shall sense it no more, that aroma of the river familiar to me from childhood.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND DAY'S VOYAGE. BUCKINGHAM TO STONY STRATFORD.

“ And nearer to the river’s trembling edge
There grew broad flag flowers, purple pranked with white;
And starry river buds among the sedge
And floating water lilies, broad and bright,
Which lit the oak which overhung the hedge
With moonlight beams of their own watery light,
And bulrushes and reeds of such deep green
As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen.”

—SHELLEY.

O F “ Bookingham ” I have naught to say, save that it is quaint and old world. I am not in the least interested in Spede’s description of it : “ As fruitfully seated upon the river Ouse, once fortified by a Ramphire and Sconces on both banks by King Edward the Elder . . . that the river circulates this towne on every side, over which three faire bridges lead.” I am much more interested in an ancient “ Bookinghamite,” one Henry Smith, who attached himself to me on the quay, cleaned the filthy canoe, and made himself generally useful. He assured me that no boat had ever come before from Brackley, nor was there a single boat to be found at “ Bookingham.” Once, some twenty years ago, a party had reached Buckingham, but went back from there.† If Mr. Smith spoke the truth, then Master Spede, with his “ three faire bridges,” does not speak the truth, for Mr. Smith informed me that the three bridges were all built within his father’s memory, and as proof he pointed to the ancient coach ford, just opposite, which issued upon the causeway of the White Horse Hotel, and led up thence to the White Horse Courtyard. How the coach forded a winter flood I know not. I doubt Mr. Smith on this point, for Samuel Pepys arrived here from Bedford on the 8th June, 1668, and speaks of “ a fair bridge here with many arches.” Of Buckingham one may say that “ it *was*,” and if it had a past it must have been in the days of Edward the Elder, with his “ ramphire and sconces.”

“ Bookingham ” might apparently have taken its share in the prosperity of modern times had not local opinion opposed the coming of the Great Central Railway through it. So I suppose it is destined to remain in this back-water of the Ouse, and await the weekly recurring stir of market day, when the farmers come to chaffer for bullocks and barley.

Mr. Smith tells me it is eight miles by road to Stony Stratford, and at

† I have been able to identify this party. A letter from the Rev. W. J. Webber Jones, son-in-law of the late Canon Haddock, of Clapham, Beds., runs thus :—

“ In 1892 two Selwyn men and I went up the river from Bedford on June 20th. We spent nine days on the river, reaching Buckingham, but finding ourselves in the backyard, and finally reached home in Clapham on the 29th, having much enjoyed ourselves, but it was a disappointment to us not to get beyond Buckingham. Starting at Clapham we spent the nights at Felmersham, Olney, Stony Stratford, Thornton Hall, Buckingham. Unfortunately, the actual diary of 1892 is lost.”

least 17 miles by river, and that there are four mills to pass, Bourton, Maids-morton, Thornborough, and Thornton. As Admiral of the Fleet my sailing directions for the day are lenient, and "sealed orders" are for Stony Stratford that evening, for the Colonel and I are not so young as we once were. I would add here that already my authority as Admiral of the Fleet begins to be insidiously challenged. It is no light thing to command a fleet of which the supposed able seamen are a C.R.E. and a 2nd Lieutenant, and the C.R.E. is evidently slowly but firmly pushing to the Quarter Deck, closely followed by the 2nd Lieutenant, and it seems their obvious intention to treat me as a mere author, whose main duty is to take notes and observe local colour, while the chief direction of things be left to practical men, whose military training has taught them to act in emergencies. However, I will not surrender the Quarter Deck easily.

We slip down stream, past charming ancient walled gardens, somewhat neglected and decayed, as is everything in Buckingham. It looked like the banks of the Eure or Oise or some other stream of Normandy; one expected to see the familiar French blanchisseuse beating out her snowy linen on the quaint river side platform. Presently we come to the first spillway, where we wish to pass, but there seated full in the way upon her nest is a mother swan, "the pen," as she is called, while the husband—"the cob"—angrily ruffles his feathers below in the stream. Now swans are very beautiful, but at breeding-time, bad-tempered birds, and on the Little Ouse I have had occasion to beat them off with a paddle when they attacked, so we give the mother swan a wide berth, while C.B. creeps as near as is safe, to get the photograph of Mrs. Pen, such as you see, upon her nest. Swans are stupid birds. If you creep under one bank in the hope to pass round them they will go on angrily ahead until at last they take wing. This is a process much like the rising of an aeroplane; their wide, outstretched wings beat the water for some 50 yards; then they seem running with their feet upon the water, and finally they slowly rise in the air, a magnificent sight, as with outstretched wings and necks they show the biggest British bird which flies, uttering the peculiar "honk," which is their note. How the tradition arose of the swan's death song, "who chants a doleful hymn to his own death"—a note "like the note of a violin," I cannot imagine, for anything more unmusical than its note cannot be heard. I have often wondered what becomes of swans, for this is the breeding season, and we see in the next few days many little broods of freshly hatched cygnets, like little balls of grey wool, riding on the pen's back or paddling behind, often as many as 7 at a time. Our forefathers valued them as a lordly dish for the banquet, and on the Thames the Royal Swans are marked as King's property, with five nicks, three lengthwise and two across the bill, while the Vintner's Company mark with two nicks, on swan "hopping" (upping) days. The peculiar marks of such great monastic establishments as Ely are recorded in books upon the Fen. (See Appendix XII). But now on most rivers swans are masterless birds; no man desires them, and no sportsman shoots them. I suppose otters account for many cygnets.

And here suddenly begins the life of the river. Wild duck get up in flocks out of the reeds; moorhens fly clucking ahead of us; the peewit is everywhere, and there are in sight no less than four great herons, with their long legs behind them, on the wing, uttering the "frank"—their peculiar cry. This is another neglected bird, for which our forefathers kept their heronries, though I think a heron must be a fishy and weedy bird to eat.

Soon after Buckingham there comes in upon the left bank a small brook which my map tells me drains the great lake of Stowe Palace. I suggest to the crew that we moor and stroll up the hill, and try and get a sight of the great façade quite near. Pope wrote of it, and Thomson celebrated "The fair majestic paradise of Stow." Horace Walpole chatted in its gardens, and wrote amusing accounts of its evening fêtes, where all the world assembled. I could make quite a "purple patch" of it in my book, but C.B. insists we are there to make a voyage and possibly to write a book, and that Stowe lies beyond my quarter of a mile limit. Reluctantly I yield with a plaintive remark that "we shall never have the chance again." I break the monotony of the paddle with meditations on the phrase, "we shall never have the chance again." How many things and scenes and persons we heedlessly pass in life, and fail to draw from them the inspiration we might have done, and "we shall never have the chance again." Perhaps, if here and there we had taken the chance, it might have changed the whole current of our days. And here I recall how my "bow" paddle once used the phrase, "we shall never have the chance again." It fell out in this wise. I once took C.B., when a little boy, a voyage to the West Indies. We sailed by the once beautiful town of St. Pierre in Martinique, destroyed by the great eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, and saw the dreary desolation of congealed mud and ashes which cover the site; and the prows and masts of ships sunk in the harbour projecting above the water. The whole population of 30,000 perished instantaneously. At the next island of St. Lucia we visited a native curio shop filled with the usual bric-a-brac and truck of a tropical island, presided over by a hideous negress. I promised C.B. that he should have his choice up to the value of 5/-. At length I was excitedly summoned to view his selection. I gazed horrified upon a large cardboard whereon was wired a scorched human scalp, and inscribed below was "The scalp of the first mate of the S.S. *Rhoddam*." I indignantly refused to acquire this gruesome relic. "Oh, but, daddy, we may never have the chance again, and it is only 4/6."

So we pass by the chance of seeing Stowe, and all for the sake of a little book which few may read.

We pass Bourton Mill and then Maidsmorton, a lonely, desolate, disused mill, where for a short time the Ouse is one with a canal, and just below we come to the Ouse's first big tributary, Claydon Brook. The stream appears far greater than the Ouse itself. This is the piratical stream which, as I have described, is eating back into the head waters of the Cherwell; and quite probably some thousands of years hence it will rob the Thames of the upper waters of the Cherwell and the Great Ouse become a much larger stream. At Thornborough Mill I discuss fish with the miller, while examining his very perfectly constructed eel-trap, which gave him fish enough to largely keep his household. I was amazed to learn that recently his eel-trap had contained a carp of 6lbs. weight, and a salmon-trout of about the same weight. Eels were caught in quantities. I shall return to the subject of this carp and salmon trout later.

Though we have been traversing first Northamptonshire on the one bank and Oxfordshire on the lower bank, and then Buckinghamshire on both banks, Northants. creeps up again for a short time on our left, and Bucks. on our right. This is not a very interesting part of the river, for it traverses vast tracts of meadow land. Suddenly we come full upon 25 hunters turned out to grass. They arrive full canter to the bank, and eagerly watch us. "What are

these three humans doing?" Their equine memories slowly recall the last Meet of hounds. "Perchance this strange thing in which these humans sit is a motor-car, and this is a Meet. But where are the hounds? Coming, surely." We give them a loud, "Hark forrard, tally ho." They wheel round, and we have the stirring spectacle of 25 hunters going in full cry after some imaginary fox. Their hoofs sound like muffled thunder on the soft grass, and gradually die away, for they gallop the full length of a mile-long meadow, and then they wheel, and are in full cry again for the bank, with a great bay mare, with a magnificent stride, heading the pack, and she wins by a neck as they pull up on their haunches and drop down upon the bank opposite us, half wild with excitement. It reminds me of Virgil's imitation of the hoof beat, "*Quadripedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.*" We had had a fine steeplechase of riderless steeds for our entertainment, and had we been betting men we might have had a book upon them, but I should have laid odds upon the bay mare. The lucky huntsman who rode her last winter, I imagine, was in at the death every time if he could sit in his saddle.

And now we are skirting what should have been a forest of magnificent trees upon the right bank, which our map tells us is the estate of Thornton Hall, but something has gone wrong with the forest, for it is somehow turned into a marsh, and many once splendid trees stand, gaunt and dead, their roots evidently chilled by the cold water. Here lies prone in the stream a magnificent chestnut tree, uprooted by some flood of last winter through the water loosening the soil at its roots, and yet it has made one last effort for life, and has thrown out a final crop of full leaf and beautiful white chestnut blossoms. I suppose by next spring it will lie a gaunt, dreary spectre of itself—dead. And then suddenly on the right bank we come to a stately mansion, Thornton Hall. The place, so my County History tells me, was once the seat of lordly families who kept baronial state there in the past, but I am not writing of such matters. And then I discovered the secret of that dying forest above; for some selfish person in the past had dammed the river from bank to bank with a great brick barrier over which the river trickles down a drop of 8 to 10 feet. Very picturesque to see, no doubt, from the drawing-room of Thornton Hall, but an act of sheer, wanton selfishness. We are presently to see the destructive nature of this barrier by the wreckage of the river for some miles below. Of course, when the floods come in winter the upper river pours over the barrage with frightful force. If I may offer a suggestion to the Ouse Drainage Board which is to be formed, I would advise them to visit this spot where they will find some useful work to do in removing this picturesque but destructive barrier. But there seems something uncanny about Thornton Hall; three fair damsels are playing ball, like the maidens of Nausicaa—on the lawn—but at the first glimpse of us, novel as must the sight of a boat have been to them, they turn and fly, and presently the side door opens and a nun emerges, who, without a glance at us, paces up and down the walk between us and the Hall, like an agitated hen. We have come upon a nunnery, and it is half-past twelve, and we have disturbed the recreation hour of the novices, and lest they brake the "Rule of the Eye" their recreation hour has been suddenly cut short, and they have been banished to their cells, for fear the rude male eye of two such ancient buffers as the Colonel and myself, to say nothing of C.B., should rest upon them. Though the ecclesiastical sentry continued her agitated beat, we took a photograph of that barrier for the possible use and information of the Ouse Drainage Board, and then

we hastened away in time, I hope, for the novices to resume their game of ball before the bell rang for some "Hour," or for lunch.

Needless to say the river grew rushy and shallow with many snags and fallen trees. It seems as though the Ouse from time to time were attacked by measles or some other childish complaint, and we have recourse to the bill-hook. Away to the right, but far removed from the bank, stands the picturesque village of Beachampton. It is strange how utterly different villages look as seen from their river side, and from the street side that motorists view. From the river you see them bowered in trees, with their church tower just showing above them; you see their little back gardens and flower plots as they have been for centuries, and you see nothing of the little cheap modernised shop fronts in their streets, their advertisements of motor accessories, and all the vulgarities of to-day. I am sure that voyaging through Bedfordshire most people would fail to identify any one of the riverside villages familiar to them, if approaching them from the river. They are totally different—old world and unspoilt on their river side. Away again upon our right is the village of Passenham, so called because Edward the Elder defended the ford there against the Danes. It was here that Thomas Pennant in his "Tour from Chester to London," in 1782, struck the Ouse. He was evidently much taken with it, and wandered down its course to Stony Stratford, Tyringham, Gayhurst, Lathbury and Newport Pagnell, and of his impressions more when our canoe passes. Here at Passenham he noted the curious fact that the church was dedicated to St. Guthlac, the founder and patron saint of Crowland in the Fens, an unique dedication. Close to the stream stands a very ancient Manor House, evidently of the Tudor period, untenanted.

It is curious how the great of the earth in former times liked to build their mansions right on the banks, while their attendant villages drew further afield with discreet foreboding of winter floods. I suppose these great people only came there for the summer months, and if the winter flood did flow through the with-drawing-room—its carpets were of rushes, and its furniture crude, and it would cleanse the lower rooms of much of the accumulated filth which made a mediæval mansion uninhabitable for more than short stays. The bed-rooms above might be somewhat musty, but the place would be dry and habitable by the next July. In the meantime it was pleasant to sit upon the banks and fish, and I agree with them. I would live in a house on the banks of the Ouse, even if it were occasionally flooded not quite up to its ceilings.

Every village and little town we pass has its ancient history of high sounding names and lordly families, castle and mansion, which have yielded to the commonplace of to-day. Spede remarks of one of Ouse's "little towns," "Thus as this citie, so the olde families have been here with time outworne, few onely (of the many former) now remaining whose surnames before the raigne of the last Henry were in this Shire of any eminency"; but

"Non indignemur mortalia Nomina solvi
Cernimus exemplis Oppida posse mori."

"Let's not repine that Men and Names doe dye
Since Stone built Cities dead and ruin'd lye."

At last we come in sight of the long causeway and bridge of Stony Stratford, which carries the Roman road of Watling Street across the vast expanse of meadow land, which in winter will be deep in flood. We reckon this out as a day's voyage of 17 miles. Ouse now is a respectable river, often with broad fine reaches, but despite that it is now admirable for boating, and our last obstacles, we hope, are far behind us, we can find only two solitary private boats in Stony Stratford. And so for the night to an inn, which shall be nameless, for fear I should be issued a writ of libel, for with its utmost endeavour it could not rise above the omni-present ham and eggs, and with that we must be content, but we had had a splendid voyage. We had recovered from our exhaustion. If Charles Kingsley's ideal of happiness was "T-t-to l-lie on his b-b-belly in t-the s-s-un," I could have told him one still higher ideal, to twiddle your naked toes in a canoe for five days, until they lose the pallor born of those abominations of civilisation, boots and socks, and return to the healthy hue of a bare-footed Italian shepherd, as God intended them to be.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIRD DAY'S JOURNEY. STONY STRATFORD TO OLNEY.

There is an inward voice, which in the stream
Sends forth its spirit to the listening ear,
And in a calm content it floweth on
Like wisdom welcome with its own respect;
Clear in its breast—like all true beauteous thoughts
It doth receive the green and graceful trees,
And the grey banks smile in its peaceful arms.

—W. E. CHANNING.

STONY STRATFORD is an ancient place upon the Watling Street, which discreetly withdraws itself well away south of the river, and gives roadway north by a long stone causeway and bridge. Shakespeare's Richard III. tells of it, for close at hand Edward IV. courted Elizabeth Woodville, and here Richard Crookback seized the little Edward V. and his maternal uncles. Its long street gives little of interest to the motorist, but wander in its secluded side streets, and you are back in ancient days. I debate why a very ancient church tower surrounded by mouldering gravestones sleeps solitarily in a lonely backway, but old Pennant arrives in time to tell me that the town was greatly damaged by fire in 1742, "but was soon restored by the vigour of English charity," while one of its two churches, St. Giles, was never rebuilt. I rise betimes to assuage my conscience by early orisons at the other church, for this is Whitsunday, and my early youth lay under a strict ban against a boat on Sunday, and was I not once sent to bed for being found reading *in* the boat-house, fifty odd years ago—and we must lift Olney by nightfall. It is but six miles to Newport Pagnell by road, but $12\frac{1}{2}$ by river, and another nine miles on the water to Olney. The rushes are now growing densely, and the river forces its channel through, running swiftly in the narrowed space. Down the long green avenues, amid the gentle swish of the rushes, with just a touch of the paddle to guide or a sharp tug to bring the bow round some freakish turn. It is right pleasant travelling, for Ouse is treating us in gentlemanly fashion to-day; and the day is one of peerless sunshine. And then begins an added charm, for first the bells of Stony Stratford behind, and then far and near village belfries take up the refrain of the bell.

The metal with fire was tempered well,
Ere men could make it a perfect bell;
When thou the fire hast passed too,
God grant thy soul may ring as true.
Twixt heaven and earth I hang and share
In God's own thought, then waking tell
The message that I gather there
To all whose ears are tuned well.

And he must indeed be deaf whose ears are not "tuned well" this glorious summer morning, to hear the stir of God's creation and to feel that

"all things were very good," as once when the morning and the evening were the first day.

A canoe is to a rowing boat as a sailing vessel to a steamer. Canoe and sailing vessel spread no disturbance ahead or abaft, and fail to scare the finny tribes around one. The grind of the steamer engine and screw, the croak of the boat oar and rullocks, spread alarm ahead and spoil the mirroring water, and you see nothing of the watery world below. But stay your canoe paddle, and watch the underlife of the river. Yonder is a pike, head up stream, watching for his prey; for down there in those waving forests shaken by the watery wind, it is the law of the jungle which prevails—kill or be killed—*nulla sors tertia manet*. And over there in the shallows, in the shade of a bush, is the slow waving tail of a great chub, on the watch for the mayfly—a swirl and a splash, and the mayfly has met his fate.

Fish (fly replete) in depth of June
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon,
Ponder deep wisdom dark or clear,
Each secret fishy hope or fear.

Shoals of roach and dace race warily by, and a goggle-eyed perch puts up his red fins, stares haughtily and huffily cold shoulders you. And now we are passing under the great viaduct of the Grand Junction Canal, close to the viaduct of the London and North Western Railway, with the workshops of New Wolverton away to the right. A bargee overhead hails us. He "'Adn't seen no boat go under for 20 years. There was good fish about yere. Two jack of 25 lbs. each had been caught hereabouts last winter. No, there wasn't many barges went along nowadays; railways had cut 'em out. And then these 'ere Trade Unions forbade families spending the night on canal boats, said it was unsanitary. Children fell off the barges and got drowned and got no schooling, so they said. He'd brought up a family—as 'ealthy as you'd wish to see. In course they fell overboard sometimes, but they swam like eels, and as for eddication, well they could get tickets and go to school wherever the barge anchored. But barges were done for, and he supposed he'd 'ave to go for a railway porter or grease box man." And so slowly dies another industry which saw the light at vast expense and with high hopes some 120 years ago, and gradually declined after the railway rush, and now is *in extremis*, though "they did their bit" in the war, and relieved congested railways. C.B., who has always been great on railways since a child, points me out a long line of disused carriages of the old North London Railway, now electrified, in a siding. They had spent their lives in the smokey tunnels of North London, and now, useless and decaying, they pass a decrepit age gazing over the wide valley of the Ouse, blown through by the sweet breezes of summer. For myself I would covet such an end after the rush and turmoil of life. Close by, on our right, comes in the second great tributary of the Ouse, the Tow, flowing down from Towcester. We are now on a fine broad river, with the ruined church of Stantonbury on our right, and Haversham on our left. Here two swans, with a troupe of fluffy baby cygnets, threaten to bar our way; but on second thoughts they are more discreet than valorous and edge down stream ahead of us croaking angrily, and blustering with their feathers. One by one the little cygnets are abandoned exhausted, to find refuge and cry plaintively from the reed beds. In sheer pity for them we halt

by the bank, to allow these heartless parents to return. C.B. stalks warily to get a snapshot of them, for they too have halted ahead, and are busy in an angry domestic altercation, as you see in the picture.

Mrs. Penn—"It is just like you, Cob. I regret that I ever married such a coward. We meet these miserable humans and you are off, caring nothing for your wife, and the safety of these darling babes who are crying their hearts out, frightened to death, in the reeds up stream—Coward!—Poltroon!"

Mr. Cobb—"My dear—you *will* get so excited; it is bad for you in your present condition of convalescence to get so nervy. What do you want me to do? You can't want me to attack three humans in two boats and get my head cracked by a paddle, and leave you a widow and the children orphans. You let your tongue run away with you. Besides I am not so young as I was, and it is for me as head of the family to decide on the most prudent course. You fuss too much over the children and spoil them; they must learn to fend for themselves. As for courage, you know how bravely I beat off that Jack Otter, who tried to steal little Johnnie."

But apparently the family jar ends, and it occurs to their brainless minds that they have but to get on the wing, circle over us, and return to the family hearth and lamenting family. So up they get with vast beating of wings and splashing of water, and circle round high over us with a honk-honk-honk. Good heavens! If they had the sense and courage to charge us in that mighty flight they would mow us down like an aeroplane, to be found with broken necks in the mowing grass, for on the wing they are as the thunderbolt. Happily nature did not endow them with brains, or they would be like pterodactyls to oolite man.

The stream begins meandering and splitting up into many little side streams, the choice of which is difficult, and leads us sometimes into dense barrages, heaped up by last winter's flood and into snaggy pools. The whistle sounds the wanderer's call, for the canoes have got separated. Suddenly there goes the S.O.S. Round we go and hasten to the rescue. We sight the Colonel, who has struck a snag fatally. The intrepid soldier sits to attention, sounding his S.O.S., but calm and collected to the end. I am reminded of the sinking of the *Birkenhead*. Already his decks are awash and himself waist deep. We effect an heroic rescue, and safe on the bank ruefully examine where a snag has knocked a hole as big as a half-crown. Why we have escaped such a fate earlier I do not know. We make note never again to come canoeing without a patching outfit, for all we can muster is a piece of sticking plaster. There is nothing for it but to berth the shipwrecked mariner in our bark, and tow the water-logged canoe behind us.

Away on our right is the beautiful Hall of Little Linford, whose owner has kindly given me frank pass of his waters, and we are going under one of the series of ancient red brick bridges which span, in line across the wide meadow land, the devious streams into which the Ouse divides hereabouts. We trend away northwards in one of Ouse's great loops, along wide beautiful reaches with yellow hills of buttercups on our left; edge round southward by Lathbury, and reach Newport Pagnell, the third of our "little towns." Here, though still far from home, I feel almost in home waters, for two miles away is Chicheley Hall, the home of my late brother, Sir George Farrar, Bart., and I know many folks hereabouts. We have a kindly welcome from Mr. Bucknell at his charming Mill House. He is a mighty Nimrod of the

Ouse with the Bucks. Otter Hounds; so we fall to talk of fish, bird and otter. First I ask of the carp and salmon trout which had fallen into the eel trap at Thornborough Mill. He had heard of but never seen such fish in the Ouse, but no doubt they escaped from the great fish Stews at Stowe, via the little brook I had noted just beyond Buckingham. Carp on the Continent have been recorded up to 100 lbs. in weight, but 25 lbs. seem to be the limit in this country. Writing of carp in the Norfolk Broads, the Rev. R. Lubbock quotes an ancient recipe for stewing carp, which begins with the words, "First catch your carp." A prudent caution—for it is a problem to find a line strong enough to hold and fine enough to elude this most wily fish, who has some mysterious guile in avoiding net and line, and is rarely caught. Mr. Bucknell himself once lived at Tyringham, which we shall soon reach, so I seek his opinion on the following statement of Pennant (Tour from London to Chester). Pennant, speaking of a visit to the old Tyringham House, which he calls "a respectable old house," the predecessor of the present house, says "As my curiosity led me to explore the kitchen, I found on the walls the rude portraits of the following fish, recorded to be taken in the adjacent river, in the years below-mentioned.

A carp, in 1648, 2 feet 9 inches long.

A pike, in 1658, 3 feet 7 inches long.

A bream, 2 feet 3½ inches long.

A salmon, 3 feet 10 inches long.

A perch, 2 feet 0 inches long.

A shad, in 1683, 1 foot 11 inches long.

These are the records of rural life; important to those who were perhaps disengaged from the bustle and cares attendant on politics and dissipation."

I confess I am somewhat staggered at the dimensions; I wish the weights had been added. No doubt the outlines of the fish were drawn on the kitchen walls with fair accuracy, as I have seen record salmon and trout carved on the thresholds of Norwegian inns. They are all, save the shad, fish recorded as having been caught in the Ouse. Mr. Bucknell and I were not prepared to question any except the shad, of which we had no knowledge. It is a fish akin to the herring tribe, reaching a normal length of 30 inches, and about eight pounds weight. In the spring shoals ascend the rivers, sometimes to enormous distances, reaching Switzerland, via the Rhine, or Bohemia, via the Elbe. They are rare in British rivers, except the Severn and the Shannon. The carp no doubt came from Stowe. The pike scarcely exceeds one caught by my brother George in my presence, when we were boys, in Southill Park Lake, 23½ lbs., and in very poor condition. It is to be seen stuffed at Chicheley Hall. The record for pike is one of 52 lbs. weight, caught in Whittlesey Mere in 1851, an oil painting of which was exhibited at South Kensington in 1873, among Buckland's Collection. It was 52 inches in length, the head measuring 13 inches. Of the salmon, the Royal Victorian History states that the Ouse, a hundred miles from its mouth to above Bedford, was in early times a salmon river. It quotes three authenticated instances of salmon caught in the Ouse within the last 80 years.

One of 6 lbs., caught in the eel traps of Cardington Mill in 1840.

One of 10 lbs. at the same spot in 1852.

One of 9½ lbs., caught in the eel traps of Kempston Mill on the 22nd Dec., 1880.

The great salmon at Tyringham at first roused my incredulity, but on second thoughts I accept Pennant's account as authentic.

Salmon only "run" when the river is in flood, that they may deposit their ova in shallow water in the upper reaches. In flood time I can conceive the Ouse would offer no insurmountable obstacle to a leaping salmon even unaided by salmon ladders. I hold with the Victorian County History that the Ouse was once a good salmon river, and I conceive it was so in monastic days.

Meanwhile, the Colonel had procured a bicycle tyre-mending kit, and with the aid of the Bucknell boys and hot pitch, had patched his canoe.

Pennant remarks of Newport Pagnell: "It has flourished greatly by means of the lace manufacture, which we stole from the Flemings, and introduced with great success into this country. There is scarcely a door to be seen during the summer but which is occupied by some industrious, pale-faced lass; their sedentary occupation forbidding the roses to blossom in their cheeks."†

I fancy that lace is no longer the staple industry of prosperity there; at all events, the roses in blossom were quite evident in the cheeks of the lasses of Newport Pagnell.

Newport Pagnell had stirring times in 1643, when Sir Lewis Dyve, of Bromham Hall, on the Ouse, of whom more anon, the Digbys of Gayhurst, Tyringhams from Tyringham, and Chesters from Chicheley, fortified the town in the King's name until expelled by the Earl of Essex and Sir Samuel Luke of Cople on the Ouse. It is an oft-told tale which I cannot stay to repeat. There is good reason to believe that John Bunyan—then aged 16—was in the Parliamentary levy of Bedfordshire men sent to the siege of Newport Pagnell. I suppose the portraits of Charles I. and Charles II., which are to be found in various country houses hereabouts, as at Chicheley Hall, represent "Old Rowley's" economic plan of recognising past loyal services to the House of Stuart at that date, as an autographed photograph of royalty recognises merit to-day.

Just past Newport Pagnell Bridge, on the right, stands Tickford Abbey, now occupied apparently by some charitable institute, which sends visitors there, and they unwisely enough are waging war over riparian rights with Mr. Bucknell, wherein they are certain to come off worst, whereas a little politeness might go for privileges, which they claim as rights. The latter has told us it is estimated to be 71 miles to Bedford, but our calculations finally estimated the distance as about 50 miles. Hereabouts the Ouse almost loops the loop, for while we have been travelling south-east to Newport Pagnell we now trend far away north-west, almost returning on Lathbury, and are to voyage the long reach of Tyringham due west.

† According to George Unwin (Shakespeare's "England"), the introduction of pillow lace—called bone lace, from the bone bobbins—is attributed to Catharine of Aragon, who is said to have taught it to the people of Amptill while awaiting her trial. It spread early in the XVIIth century through Beds., Bucks., and Northants. Shakespeare must have seen it in his journeys between Stratford and London, in Buckinghamshire villages, and heard the song of—

The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones.

At Tickford Abbey comes in the Ousel, or the Lovat, which rises near Leighton Buzzard, a good otter stream, and a few hundred yards further comes in Chicheley Brook, which I think must once have been called "Crawley Brook," for an ancient Bedfordshire proverb runs, "Crooked as Crawley Brook." Hard by, at Willen, was born that redoubtable Jacobite, Bishop Atterbury, whose father, the Rector of Milton Keynes, was drowned in trying to cross Chicheley Brook in flood time in 1693.

We pass Sherington Bridge, and then begins a stately stretch of river, broader and far more beautiful than anything to be seen from Brackley to Lynn. While I do not know the Severn, I can say I know nothing on the Thames which surpasses this stretch of Ouse, for it has the added charm that it flows in perfect solitude, unspoilt by boats or river parties, the wild life of its banks as unmarred as if it were a primeval river. My pen can do no justice to this part of the river, nor a photograph give idea of its beauty. Only an artist, and he of rare talent, could limn the scene. On this summer day it was a pageant of colour—a water avenue decked as though for a monarch's triumphal barge. The sapphire jewelled backs of two kingfishers flit down it, and the sheen of the mallard's neck, as he and his people rise out of the reed beds, gives an almost oriental glint to it all.

" There lay the glade and neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn,
Out of a speckled cloud.
Sweet views which in our world above
Can never well be seen
Were imaged by the water's love
Of that fair forest green;
And all was interfused beneath
With an Elysian glow;
An atmosphere without a breath,
A softer day below."

The reach is wide enough for a 'Varsity race, and in pre-war days regattas here were renowned. The river flows majestically on, bordered on the right by a stately park, where hawthorn, white and red chestnuts, and other flowering trees line its banks, while away to the left rise gentle hills, golden yellow to-day as charlock with buttercups, and a mile ahead a graceful one-arched bridge gives roadway to Tyringham House. Past a rare boathouse and Tyringham Church, where rest many ancient Tyringhams, one brass recording a John Tyringham who died in 1484, while a Geoffrey Tyringham endowed Tickford Abbey in 1187, and they were here in this Ouse-side paradise before that. The modern mansion is a great pile of no special beauty, but if George IV. had planted here his hideous Brighton Pavilion (of which Sidney Smith said it seemed to him "as though St. Paul's Cathedral had come down to Brighton and pupped"), it could scarcely have spoilt this Eden by the Ouse. We have scarcely passed Tyringham when we come on a scene which almost makes me retract what I have written and put Tyringham second, for high upon our left is a little cluster of brown-tiled cottages bowered in trees, the tiny hamlet of Gayhurst, and I know we are close to the most famous and beautiful house on the Ouse, alas not visible from the river—Gayhurst. When writing for

a free pass for my canoe, I had received a kind invitation from the owner, Mr. Carlile, to call *en route* when passing, but the sun is westering, and Olney still far; besides our clothes are now too disreputable to allow of a call. So I must write and apologise, and ask for a view of Gayhurst, for this book will be incomplete without it. The park slopes upward on our left, and through it comes "Digby's Walk," which passes by a tunnel under the roadway from the house. My thoughts run on to the ill-fated Sir Everard Digby, master of this lordly domain, who perished for his share in the Gunpowder Plot. The secret rooms of Gayhurst will never give up their tale of conspiracy. How he fell under the domination of Father Garnet, whether he understood the full extent of the plotted deed, who shall say. Shakespeare says "Conscience doth make cowards of us all," but not always, and he was an exception.

Though the river has flowed for three hundred and fourteen summers and winters since past Gayhurst, the tragedy of Sir Everard Digby still seems to brood there. The river and the human heart are so alike in the vicissitudes of life. Born in 1581, some say 1578, of an ancient and honourable family, settled at Drystoke in Rutlandshire, he was left an orphan at 11 to be reared under the uncontrolled direction of Jesuit priests. He married in 1596 Mary, daughter and heiress of William Mulso, of Gayhurst, and so became its master. He was knighted in 1603. Nature and good fortune gave him every desirable gift; he was of great stature and bodily strength, adept in all sports, and devoted to hunting and hawking, leading the happy life of a country squire, possessed of a charming wife and two little boys, the second of whom became the famous savant, Sir Kenelm Digby. Slowly he was drawn into the toils of conspiracy to re-establish the Catholic Faith, as a devoted son of Holy Church. How far he was actually admitted to the full secret and atrocity of the Gunpowder Plot will never be known. His part was to be ready to head a rising in the Midlands. Probably Gayhurst received Father Garnet in its secret chambers, and Guy Fawkes seems to have hidden there in one of the prorogations of Parliament which delayed the plot, and Sir Everard gave £1,500 to the expenses.

In September, 1605, Garnet conducted a pilgrimage of 30 Catholic ladies and gentlemen from Gayhurst to St. Winifred's Well, Holywell, staying there one night and accomplishing the journey of 300 miles in nine days. The presumed object was to supplicate the Saint's blessing on the conspiracy.

Howbeit, among the fugitive conspirators arrested at Holbeach House, on the borders of Staffordshire, was Sir Everard Digby. His letters to his wife from the Tower, written in juice of lemon on loose slips of paper, were found with other documents in 1675 in the house of Charles Cornwallis, executor to Sir Kenelm Digby, and printed in 1678. A single sentence from one letter tells all the workings of his mind: "Now for my intentions, let me tell you, that if I had thought there had been the least sin in the plot I would not have been of it for the world, and no other drew me to hazard my fortune and my life but zeal to God's religion." That old, old argument that the end justifies the means; his crimes were in the strictest sense his errors. He remained an upright and honourable gentleman to the end, despite a conspirator. He alone of them all made a dignified and honourable defence. He would inculcate nobody else, least of all Father Garnet and Father Gerard. "I have before all the Lords cleared all the priests in it for anything that I know." He would shelter behind none. He had played the

game of conspiracy and high treason, and he took defeat as a good sportsman takes the rubs of the game. He was but 26 years of age.

* * * * *

As the hurdle on which the unhappy man was bound bumped over the cobbles that bleak January day, 1606, down East Chepe to St. Paul's Church Yard, amid the roar of the populace, and there stole to his sense the smell of boiling pitch, and grim gallows and quartering block came to painful view, what agonised thoughts were his! Of a fair young wife weeping in Gayhurst by the Ouse, of two little boys asking when father would come home again, and toddling off to stroke his bay mare in the stables, and tease his grey falcon, and throw crusts to his staghounds. A last vision of all that fair domain of Gayhurst and the by-flowing Ouse, and so he died with an "*in tuas manus*" on his lips, a very gallant gentleman, albeit a sore misguided one.†

* * * * *

And as we float by Gayhurst I seem in fancy to see a tall, fair cavalier come striding down Digby's walk to the banks of the river, removing the hood from the grey falcon on his wrist. As a mallard rises from the reed bed down streams he slips the leash, and tosses the falcon in the air, and then runs halloing down the bank, as falcon and mallard circle upwards and swoop away over the trees, waving his hand the while to a fair lady who, with two little boys clinging to her skirts, is just topping the slope of the hill above.

* * * * *

We steer away again north-east between Emberton on the right, and Weston Underwood on the left, lying well away from the wide pasture land we are passing. How Edward IV. and the great "King Maker" sat beleaguered hereabouts is all told by Lytton's glowing pen in the "Last of the Barons."

Across these vast meadow lands we sight the steeple of Olney Church, and slowly through many winding, devious channels we approach it. My literary anxieties begin, for here are we to encounter the first famed Ousite—William Cowper. Here in the market place we shall see his old red-brick house, "Orchard Side," and up there, at Weston Underwood, which we have just passed on our left, he lived, 1786 to 1795, at Weston Lodge, before finally going to Dereham in Norfolk. Well, I have no gift of biography. Let me say at once that though he resided well within my quarter of a mile Ouse limit I hold him beyond the scope of this book, and purpose to say little of him. I have already made some silly, disparaging remarks about him because, forsooth, he did not fully share my infatuation for the beauties and charms of my beloved Ouse. But he was a great poet, and a still greater saint. But you and I are out for a water party, not on "Extension Lectures," and as I

† Pennant in 1782, describing his visit to Gayhurst, devoting some twenty pages to an account of the house and portraits, speaks of a picture of Sir Everard Digby: "At full length in a black mantle and vest, the sleeves slashed and pinked with white, large turn-overs, and turned back cuffs at his wrists. One hand holds his gloves, the other is gracefully folded in his mantle."

I hoped to have given this picture as an illustration here. The owner of Gayhurst informs me that there is no such picture at Gayhurst, though there was one of Sir Kenelm Digby, and that the former picture had possibly been removed to the Bodleian Library at Oxford. I have heard from the Librarian that no such picture was there, nor was any picture of Sir Everard Digby known. Hence I conclude that Pennant must have been misinformed, or mistaken the identity, or the family subsequently destroyed the picture.

am no longer a headmaster I claim to be no longer instructive of others. It is quite easy for you to travel by 'bus to Olney. You can sit in the arbour where "John Gilpin" was written, and where the poet argued with Bull, "dear Taureau," "the smoke inhaling Bull, always filling, never full," and took tea with Mary Unwin. You can meditate in the church where Newton preached and Cowper's soul breathed forth that yearning aspiration for peace of spirit, "Oh, for a closer walk with God." You may be fortunate enough to talk to Mr. Wright, who is indeed a true Boswell to the poet.

We as boys used to play a game called "Tom Tidler's Ground," which consisted in setting a trespassing foot on the private ground, owned, possessed and defended by the said Tom Tidler. Olney and Olney's poet is a literary "Tom Tidler's Ground." To write of it, to plagiarise Mr. Wright, to serve up a cold collation of "Cowperiana," would be at once an impertinence and a literary fraud. As well start to re-write "John Gilpin," revise "Hark, my soul, it is the Lord," and modernise "God moves in a mysterious way."

And here, to save future space, let me say that when my canoe passes other such famous people and places, I may trespass on a river, but I will not trespass on literary preserves. Thus the "Siege of Bedford," is a "Tom Tidler's Ground," whereof Mr. A. R. Goddard is the "Tom Tidler"; he has said the last word upon it, nor would I patch and botch the subject when I reach it. That "unclubable man," John Bunyan, is similarly a forbidden subject. I would not term the Rev. John Brown, writer of the "Life of John Bunyan," a "Tom Tidler," out of respect to his sacred calling, but he has written all that can be written and should be written upon Bunyan, and you can buy his book as cheaply and far more profitably than mine. Nor will I write of that "saint and martyr," John Howard, the philanthropist, who dwelt on the banks of the Ouse at Cardington. Who would have the audacity to venture an account of Ely Cathedral—from a canoe? In fact, all these, though within my quarter of a mile limit of the Ouse, are the preserves of literary "Tom Tidlors." Hence, wherever I fail out of seeming idleness or real ignorance to treat of things cognate to the Ouse upon which you, my reader, consider I should have touched, I beg you will set it down to a respect for literary vested interests and erudite "Tom Tidlors," who have been there before me.

One remark I have to make as to his name of Cowper. I have suffered many things because of it, as no doubt did the poet himself. One of the School Houses at Elstow School, over which I ruled for 23 years, was called, after the poet, "Cowper" House. Parents from a distance *would* call him Cowper, as though he were a keeper of oxen, instead of Cooper, a maker of barrels. I heard him so called only on May 26th, 1920, and in, of all places, the Educational Committee of the Borough of Bedford. I sympathise with him over his name, as with a Cholmondeley, a Majoribanks, a Crippen, or a Gladstone, and with all whose names present difficulties of pronunciation or associations with either crime or exalted virtue. Cowper must often have ground his teeth over his name, as I have done over mine. A stranger, learning my name, at once asks if I spell it with a final "a" or an "e"; I know what is coming, and I see red. "May I ask if you are related to the famous Dean Farrar?" I summon all my self-control, and reply: "Kith not Kin, first cousin five times removed. Very fine weather! Good morning!" The question, after the iteration of years, becomes like the Chinese torture of dropping water.

“What’s in a name?” A very great deal if you possess a name which has any association whatever outside the humble personality of the bearer of it. And when I see parents martyr innocent children from the baptismal font with “high falutin’” labels, it is a wanton outrage for which I would pleasurably see them publicly bastinadoed. May I be forgiven this excursus!

My canoe will pass another Ouse side residence of Cowper at Huntingdon. Once I unwittingly wandered into a Norfolk Church at Dereham, where I learnt Cowper spent the last four years of his life. On the walls stands a mural tablet.

Sacred to the Memory
of
William Cowper Esq.
Born in Hertfordshire 1732.
Buried in this Church 1800.

This is followed by wretched fulsome verses, of literary flattery without a vestige of spiritual thought—and that for a Saint of God. How the “Esq.” grates on one! So unseemly a designation for the gentle poet of Olney! Surely he would have wished, when the last summons came, to leave the poor, patient body, that had given him earthly tenement, freed from all such petty honorific trappings of life. How far more seemly to allow the soul to pass, under the plain name wherein it was made a member of Christ’s Church, to the Presence where there is neither high nor low, rich nor poor, prince nor pauper, but all humble souls seeking assoilment of earth’s stains and the eternal sphere of the spirit. “All else is leather and prunello.” The tablet to Mary Unwin also is in Dereham Church.

We pass under Olney Bridge—“a bridge of wearisome but needful length,” as Cowper calls it, though the present structure dates only from 1832.

We land at Olney and seek “The Bull.” Not a bed to let; so at other hostelries, for it is Whitsuntide, and Olney a pleasant spot in this glorious weather. Well, what of it? Sleep in the canoes? Not a bit. It is only 11 miles by road to Bedford, though some 40 odd miles by river, for as I said you want *some* arithmetic for river distances hereabouts. “Waiter, a taxi in ten minutes.” So homewards we bowl in the cool of the evening, here and there sighting the Ouse, only to see him vanish again in some vast loop which carries him away to the horizon. We sleep the sleep of the weary in our own beds, after a supper of something better than ham and eggs, jettison all superfluous luggage, and return next morning by taxi to Olney. For once I bless the meandrous course of Ouse, which allows me the comforts of home for the last two nights of my voyage.

Record by Colonel—Newport Pagnell to Olney, 9 miles.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOURTH DAY'S VOYAGE. OLNEY TO BLETSOE.

"Ouse having Olney past, as she were waxed mad,
From her first staidier course immediately doth gad,
And in meandering gyves doth whirl herself about
That, this way here and there, back, forwards, in and out;
And, like a wanton girl, oft doubting in her gait,
'The labyrinth like turns and turnings intricate,
Through these rich fields doth run."

—DRAYTON, "*Polyolbion*."

I HAVE warned my readers of the appalling "worsification" of Michael Drayton, of which the above is a specimen. If Brackley to Buckingham were "her first staidier course," I grow alarmed to hear she is going immediately to "gad" from it "Ouse having Olney past." And why has Drayton taken such an unwarrantable liberty as to convert Father Ouse into a "she" and "a wanton girl"? If there is one quality possessed by my old friend it is virility. Happily I am not prone, like Mr. Silas Wegg, "to drop into verse," or I might have perpetrated even worse poetry. By the way, Spenser makes the Ouse one of the bridesmaids at the bridal of the Thames.

Ouse winds away as sinuously from Olney as it approached it, and it is a long time before we lose Olney Church from view. We pass due north by Clifton Reynes, and under the Midland Northampton Railway viaduct. A strong north-east wind has sprung up, which all day long blew strong in our teeth, and what is worse, at times on our side, for a canoe veers badly in a cross wind, and it was hard work. Turning again due east we pass the picturesque old mill of Lavendon, or "Larndon" as they call it hereabouts (4 miles), the neighbouring village of which would seem to have been a place of importance in Plantagenet days. And so along a charming reach to Cold Brayfield House, which looks pleasantly across the river to Newton Blossomville. All this is very familiar ground to me, for many a duck shooting have I had here, or waited for their evening flight, for my brother, Captain Percy Farrar lived here for some years. On the banks, as we pass, are three Naiads, like mermaids combing their yellow locks. We have apparently just escaped the fate of Actæon. I could tell a grim story of yonder church of Cold Brayfield up there, but perhaps it is best left untold. And here comes the second boat we have met in all our voyage, and becomingly manned by, I surmise, a bridegroom, in a bathing costume, and a bride, in bathing mantle, who bid us a cheery good-morning. By and bye a plunge behind us, and yet another, and one turns round without impropriety to see an empty boat and a dark head and a fair head bobbing in the river. If my surmise was right they do far better to honeymoon here than on Brighton front, or in the Rue Rivoli.

And presently, by devious narrow passages, we reach Turvey Mill, a gaunt, burnt-out ruin, and the statue of Jonah in the Mill Pool, with a marvellous fish, looking very sick, and exhibiting a gigantic tongue, crouched

at his feet. As a matter of fact it is not Jonah, but a fisherman with his rot, presumably St. Peter. I suppose this curious statue was placed here by that very devout and ecclesiastical layman, Charles Longuet Higgins, of Turvey Abbey, who adorned various Turvey houses with scriptural texts, and as I remember him, went with long grey hair down his back, having vowed never to cut it again after bathing in the Jordan. The church hard by recalls the memory of the Rev. Legh Richmond, Rector from 1805 to 1827, writer of the "Dairyman's Daughter." It is Whit-Monday, and a crowd of children paddle round Jonah. We take shelter from sun and wind under the bridge for lunch and photographs. Above me are the boot soles of various urchins sitting on the parapet. Now mine is a helpless position below, theirs the command above, and I am on the watch. To a certain class of mischievous imp, painful experience in like positions has taught me there is an irresistible temptation to spit. I mark one saucy youth up there, and I see his fell intent beetling above me. "My lad," say I, "if you spit I will have your blood. Straight will I to my friend Mrs. H——s, and of her will I crave justice. Then to-morrow we will come to the school, and on parade will I pick you out, for I know you by that pimple on your nose. Then will you learn the English of the Norwegian penal code, 'ikke spitte da,' 'don't spit here.' " At the mention of the dread name of the great lady of the parish ten pairs of boot soles vanish, the parapet is empty, and all again is peace, for am I not now by one mile within the bounds of my native County of Bedfordshire, and would not Mrs. H——s have seen me righted, and do I not bear in my pocket a kindly letter from the Lord Lieutenant, hoping that all his Majesty's subjects on the banks of the Ouse will give me free way as I voyage past them. The Colonel notches four miles from Lavendon Mill, eight miles from Olney.

Again due north, leaving Turvey House on our right, in a dead head wind, along a fine broad stretch, through wide meadow land. On our left is a beautiful old Elizabethan farm house, "Snelson," close to the stream. Here, I remember, dwelt one, Mr. Robert Battams. To see him mounted on a hunting morning was to see as handsome and stately a figure as one could meet. He died like William III., in the saddle, from a horse stumble over a mole hill, perhaps as he would have wished to end. Somewhat tired by the head wind, I plead literary necessity to consult my favourite Spede on Bedfordshire, who begins by describing it as "a plaine and champion county." Of course, the crew, when consulted as to his meaning, answer with the ready assurance of ignorance, that "champion" is doubtless the French "campagne," meaning open, grassy country. Then if so, why did not Spede say so straight out, but it means nothing of the sort. When you want information upon any conceivable subject—all human knowledge is to be found somewhere between its booklids—consult Dr. Brewer's "Dictionary of Phrase and Fable," and look up "champion and severall." "A champion" is a common, or land in allotments without enclosures; "a severall" is a private farm or land, enclosed for individual use.

"The 'champion' differs from 'severall' much,
For want of partition, enclosure or such."

—TUSSER.

Hence Spede, who died in 1623, is describing a Bedfordshire of very different

agricultural conditions from the present, though perhaps we are returning gradually to it. Four miles from Turvey, along fine broad reaches, bring us to the charming village of Harrold, the first village on the river which really ventures to settle direct upon its banks, for even Turvey is a little coy. And here I touch a problem which has long been perplexing my mind. Camden says, "At Harewood, formerly called Harleswood (Harrold), in the year of our Lord 1399, a little before the breaking out of those Commotions and Civil Wars wherewith England was a long while embroiled, this River stood still, and the Water retiring both ways left a Passage on foot along the Channel for three Miles, together, to the Astonishment of the Beholders." The Editor of the Second Edition (1722) adds, "The same thing happened again (as I have been informed) the 18th (or else the 28th) of January in the year 1648. And as the first was looked upon to be a prognostick of the Civil Wars which ensu'd; so may this be well thought a prognostick of the death of King Charles the First." Now here is the problem which has been perplexing my mind. We have traversed far behind us deep broad reaches of river, greater than any we shall see again to the sea, notably the reach of Tyringham, and we have just voyaged from Turvey, four miles of broad deep water. Two large tributaries, the Claydon Brook, rising in Oxfordshire, the Tove, in Northants., beside the Lovat, have come in, and yet here at Harrold the stream flows shallow, so that we need to avoid grounding. Where is all the vast volume of water behind us? Is it flowing towards Bedford, and to Lynn? I think a great deal is not. Of course much water we know percolates through the oolite rock, and feeds our rock born springs, but I think that is not a full explanation, though as no geologist, I am a presumptuous theorist. The Geological Map of the Ouse Valley, bearing on the water supply to Bedford, from the great Oolite Formation, shows some peculiar features. From Turvey to Odell the river runs through an area of gravel extending widely from both banks, and skirting this on the right side, the whole way to Felmersham, is the largest area of oolite rock in the Ouse valley. Now where strata are porous water sinks in instead of running off on the surface. Lord Avebury cites cases of rivers which disappear altogether underground, or do so at times, such as the Nidd. The Mole in dry seasons disappears and runs underground for nearly three miles. He cites streams which are in part or entirely subterranean, but in wet seasons, when saturation reaches a high level, appear above ground. In Yorkshire they are known as "Gipsies," and in the south as "Bournes." He quotes the interesting case of the headwaters of the Thames flowing from the Seven Wells; the discharge from the spring head was in one minute 11 cubic feet. For the first five and a half miles, over lias clay, the flow gradually increased to 320 cubic feet; then the river reached the oolite, into which the water begins to sink, so that the flow, which at six and a half miles became 290 cubic feet, decreased rapidly with distance, until at 14½ miles it registers only 10 cubic feet.

Now I conceive that the two instances of eccentric behaviour by the Ouse at Harrold in 1399 and 1648 are natural but very abnormal cases. I conceive that the river at this point near Harrold pours a vast volume of water into some huge reservoir in the oolite, like Coleridge's River Alph—

"Where Alph the sacred river ran,
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea."

It is possible that, at long intervals, some disturbance of the strata empties this "sunless sea," whereupon the river pours into the void until its bed runs dry, and so remains until the upper waters over-ride the shallow belt at Turvey, and so the river resumes its flow. If this be true, and I think it is, the record of 1399 and 1648, abnormal though it may be, is a natural feature in the life of a river, which must be measured by æons rather than ephemeral centuries. Such an occurrence may yet present itself again, in which case, blazé though we have become, it will produce the same "astonishment of the beholders" as in 1399 and 1648.

Mr. William Steward has written a very charming little book on Harrold, "A Bedfordshire Village." He is the "Tom Tidler" of Harrold. I would not and could not add anything to his description of this interesting place, which, seen from the river, has a charm all its own, with its ancient bridge and causeway, its venerable Hall facing the river, and graceful Church Tower. Yet must I break a lance with Mr. Steward. He is "surprised when he reads such a rowdy report of so sober and generally well-conducted river as the Ouse, whose very name is suggestive of quiet and decorum." Now I decline to admit that the Ouse was ever "sober and well-conducted," or of a smug "quiet and decorum"; I should not love him as I do had he been. His character is anything but that, yet I will not allow he is "rowdy." I might quote Josephus to prove that these two cases of eccentric behaviour of the Ouse at Harrold may possibly have been brief episodes of early piety, for Josephus mentions a river in Palestine which in compliment to the Sabbath "rested every Sabbath Day." Possibly the Sunday Observance Society may take note of the matter, now it is pointed out.

To sum up my arguments, I am convinced that a great portion of the many waters of Northants., Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, etc., which the Map credits to the Ouse does not flow past Harrold as a tangible, calculable river. I boldly advance this theory because I am no geologist. There are advantages in ignorance, for nobody minds if I am wrong; they are content to call me a silly ass, and they will have forgotten they called me so next time we meet; but were I a geologist my reputation would be gone; I should be held a madman, a heretic, and a bolshevist, and never hear the last of it.

In two miles we reach Odell. We yearn for tea, but the village inn will have none of it, pleading Whit-Monday visitors. In fact, to ask for tea down the valley of the Ouse is as though one demanded Veuve Cliquot, or '47 port.

By the way, a very distinguished visitor nearly paid a state call to this little village pub. Had he actually done so I hope his entertainment would have been better than ours. It is a curious incident, possibly remembered only by one living person.

The Diary of the Governors of Bedford Gaol, to which I shall refer again, has the following entry, under the year 1845. "*Unusual Circumstances.* On the 18th January a man named Knight, son of Mr. Knight, of Odell was missing; when last seen he was inebriated on the bridge. On Monday following the body was seen floating near the mill. Steps were at once taken to hold an inquest in the usual way. As the Coroner, Mr. Eagles, had died on the Saturday previous, there was no one to hold the inquest; Mr. Whyley, the Deputy Coroner, held that his office ceased on the death of the Coroner. This naturally created a dilemma of some importance. For-

tunately, the Chief Justice of England, Sir Alexander Cockburn, was at Bedford at the Assizes, and as such was coroner of all England by virtue of his office. Application was made to his Lordship, when he expressed his willingness to go to Odell and hold the inquest, but as no jury had been summoned this was abandoned. Therefore his Lordship enquired into the circumstances of the death, and as Coroner of England, found there had been no suspicions attending death, caused the body to be interred without an inquest." An interesting legal item.

To anyone passing through the streets of Odell it is an uninteresting place, and even the front of Odell Castle itself fails to intrigue one. But see it from the river, and you are back centuries.

" A world forgotten village,
Like a soul that steps aside
Into some quiet haven,
From the full rush of tide.
A place where poets still may dream,
Where the wheels of life swing low,
And over all there hangs the peace
Of centuries ago."

Seen from the river, Odell Castle, with its neglected lawns sloping down to the Ouse, recalls some ancient French château. It might be Azay les Rideaux, on the banks of the Indre as it flows to the Loire. Its windows are shuttered, the lawns shaggy, while trees and bushes straggle or drop wearily into the river. One can fancy Monsieur Gabelle, the chatelain or steward, is anxiously awaiting the return of Monseigneur le Marquis and la Marquise and Monsieur le Vicomte. They had narrowly escaped Madam la Veuve (the Guillotine) on the Place Louis Quatorze, and are now émigrés at Cologne, while the affairs of Louis Capet go forward. Meanwhile Monsieur Gabelle hopes for the day of their return, when he will throw wide the shutters, and light the wax candles in the great salon, and bow over the hands of Monseigneur and Madame and Monsieur as he hands them from the great coach. And then all will go merry as a marriage bell; silk coated chevaliers and powdered and patched ladies will once again dance in the salon, and in the morning gallop after the huntsman, with his great horn round his shoulders, and these wretched peasants who will not pay their rents will learn that *l'ancien régime s'établit encore*, and the cry, "Vive le roi," will be heard again in the land, and he, Monsieur Gabelle, will again be "*une personne*," as of yore. Odell Castle breathes of the Loire rather than of the Ouse. There are even great clusters of mistletoe in the lombardy poplars which are rustling loud in the wind, to give a closer reminder of la belle France.

In another two and a half miles we reach Felmersham; a really lovely river view as we catch the vista of its ancient bridge, and its beautiful early English Church tower showing above the trees. But here we touch the fringe of civilisation, and somehow it comes with a slight shock to nerves lulled by four days of lonely river reaches. Somebody lets out a few ancient painted boats, and alas, one punt, a class of craft which has gone far to abolish good watermanship, and brought in its train some very undesirable features of river life in the eyes of those who love the Ouse, and it is Whit-Monday, and the vendor of boats has added a gramophone. But one must not be selfish;

"*Le monde s'amuse et tout va bien.*" Love's young dream is developing in a backwater, with a certain lack of coyness and reticence. All along a somewhat uninteresting stretch of two miles to Sharnbrook families were picnicing—

"Who dash'd the bold fork through pies of pork,
O'er hard boiled eggs the saltspoon shook.
Leapt from its lair the playful cork:
Yet some there were to whom the brook
Seemed sweetest beverage, and for meat
They chose the red root of the beet."

Anglers were angling, and bathers bathing, and lovers—well—loving, I presume, though I am too discreet to look their way. And then we leave behind "the madding crowd," and we shall see them no more until Bedford. Though only some seven miles away by road, it is some 23 miles by river—some arithmetic that—for Father Ouse is in no hurry in this pleasant land, and is about to begin the first of five vast loops, and to flow like a stream of quicksilver, now east, now west, and just where you would least expect him to go, and yet I am grateful, for I am in no hurry, and there are right charming riverside hamlets ahead.

As we slide by the pleasant garden of Ouse Manor, Sharnbrook, I think regretfully of a week-end spent there two summers ago with my old friend and school-fellow, W. L. Fitzpatrick, who would have given me welcome by the bank this afternoon. But he has journeyed, for us untimely, where

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green."

And a good sportsman, a good Christian, and a very perfect gentleman, comes no more down to the pleasant banks of Ouse.

* * * * *

The wind, which has increased towards evening, seems to draw under the great viaduct of Sharnbrook, and we have a desperate buffeting before we can force the canoe through, and are almost dashed against the great piers. But needs must, and we battle along the last one and a half miles to Bletsoe, where German prisoners have done much useful work in revetting the banks and cleaning the stream, and the "Falcon" at Bletsoe at last gives us tea and hospitality while we await the motor. I am garrulous over the luxury of tea, and discourse of the Lady Margaret Beauchamp, heiress of Bletsoe, and how she, like another great lady of the Ouse, of whom I shall tell, was the ancestress of Kings. Margaret Beauchamp married twice: by her first husband, Sir Oliver St. John, she was the ancestress of the St. Johns of Bletsoe. She then married John, first Duke of Somerset, grandson of John of Gaunt. Her daughter by this marriage, probably born at Bletsoe, in 1441, was the Lady Margaret Beaufort, who, marrying Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, became the mother of Henry VII. The great grandson of Margaret Beauchamp and Sir Oliver St. John was created Baron of Bletsoe. The second husband of Margaret Beaufort was the Lord Stanley, whose desertion of Richard III. at the Battle of Bosworth, decided the day, and established the Tudor dynasty.

She founded the Lady Margaret Divinity Professorships at Oxford and Cambridge, completed and endowed the foundation of Christ's College, Cambridge, begun by Henry VI., and refounded and enriched St. John's College, Oxford. She was described by Bishop Fisher in a funeral sermon as "A mirror and exemplor of honour; all the Common people of the realm for whom she was in their causes the common mediatrix and generally the whole realm had cause to mourn her death."

And then the Colonel offends my ear by talking of Pavvenham and Bromham, which lie ahead of us, for he has been ill-fated enough not to be born in Bedfordshire, and all Bedfordshire men know that they are called Pavenham and Brumham, as Cowper is called Cooper. So I discourse of the Rev. W. Monkhouse, Vicar of Goldington, Beds., who published "Bedfordshire Etymologies," in 1857, and how he was evidently a very learned man, who could quote any language from Icelandic to Coptic in support of his derivations, and how he points out that we are in the region of "Ham." This has nothing to do with pork, nor with the son of Noah, but is the termination of various Ouse-side villages hereabouts—Felmersham, Pavenham, Bromham, Biddenham, Blunham. I pluck forth the book, which I had surreptitiously brought from home, and read to the Colonel and C.B. the topic of "ham" as follows—"According to Grim, it is derived from an obsolete root, 'Himan,' which had the meaning of *einschliessen*, *involvere*, to surround or enclose. With respect to Ham without the circumflex, it has been remarked by the same German authorities that it frequently implies the presence of water. Now the villages with this annex abound on the banks of the Ouse, and fully correspond with the application of the word. The parish of Felmersham is literally girdled round by the stream, and a glance at the map will show that it is situated in a sort of aqueous bag." Here my listening crew refuse to tolerate further etymological theories "by the same German authorities." The Colonel trusts that their progeny have had the opportunity of studying the Ouse villages ending in "ham" in the course of prisoners' labour in revetting yonder bank, opposite the "Falcon." I can study the beastly book myself if I choose, but the crew flatly decline to listen further. No, it is of no interest to them to know that other villages we are coming to will end in "ton"—Milton, Stevington, Kempston, etc., another German root, meaning "enclosed by a fence." If I read another word the book goes in the river. But there the motor arrives, and peace is restored.

The Colonel posts the day's reckoning—

Olney to Turvey, 8 miles; Turvey to Harrold, 4 miles; Harrold to Odell, $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles; Odell to Felmersham, 2 miles; Felmersham to Sharnbrook, 2 miles; Sharnbrook to Bletsoe, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles; total, $19\frac{1}{4}$ miles.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FALCON AT BLETSOE.

"Yon rising Moon that looks for us again,
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter rising look for us
Through this same garden—and for one in vain.

—*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

THE riverside garden of the Falcon at Bletsoe reminds me that the Inn has claim to precious literary associations, for thither—often in the summers of the years from 1834 to 1859—came Edward Fitzgerald, author of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, with his bosom friend, William Kenworthy Browne, of Bedford. The story of that David and Jonathan friendship is told in Wright's "Life of Edward Fitzgerald," and I must this time venture to trespass upon Mr. Wright's preserve, for his "Life" is less well known to Bedfordians than his books on Cowper and Olney. W. Kenworthy Browne was the son of George Browne, Alderman and Mayor of Bedford in 1842, who resided in 1834 at Cauldwell Cottage (not Cauldwell House, as Mr. Wright has it), in Cauldwell Street, Bedford—for many years the residence of the late Leverton Jessopp, and recently of the late James Hobson. Soon after College days Fitzgerald met Browne at Tenby and conceived a great admiration and warm affection for him, which never flagged through 25 years of friendship, and brought him year by year to Bedford to Cauldwell Cottage, and later to Goldington Hall and Goldington Bury, where Browne lived after his marriage. Fitzgerald numbered among his early friends, Thackeray—a fellow Cantab—who came with him to Bedford, of which he made many sketches. Alfred Tennyson, Fanny Kemble, Crabbe the poet, and Carlyle, were also of his circle, but Browne was his ideal friend. Among local Bedford friends of Fitzgerald were the Rev. W. Monkhouse, to whom I have referred in my last chapter; the Rev. W. Airey of Keysoe, the Rev. T. W. Matthews, a famous preacher of Bedford, and Captain Addington, who resided at the Turnpike Cottage, which once stood, as I remember it, at the corner of Newnham Lane, on the Goldington Road. Mr. Wright has drawn vivid sketches of the local personalities.

Cauldwell Cottage, with its large room behind looking into the garden through which flows the King's Ditch, was familiar to me in my childhood. "This house," says Fitzgerald, "is just on the edge of the town, a garden on one side skirted by the public road, which again is skirted by a row of such poplars as only Ouse knows how to rear, and pleasantly they rustle now, and the room in which I write is quite cool, and opens into a greenhouse, which opens into the said garden, and it's all deuced pleasant." He was "much in love with Bedfordshire."

To quote Mr. Wright—"a favourite haunt of Browne and Fitzgerald was 'The Falcon,' at Bletsoe . . . to which they generally drove in a morning with their fishing rods. Fitzgerald, however, who never went without his colour

box, painted more pictures than he caught fish, and wished nothing better than to lie at his ease under some gnarled willow among the rich red spires of loose-strife and within view of the gently rocking water lilies. Usually they fished for perch and pike. When they went after the bream, they had to be at Bletsoe while the dew was still heavy on the grass, and get their fishing over by breakfast time. Bletsoe boasts a picturesque church and ruined castle, but it was the river rather than the antiquities that attracted Fitzgerald. 'The Inn,' says Fitzgerald, 'is the cleanest, the sweetest, the civilest, the quietest, the loveliest, and the cheapest that ever was built or conducted. On one side it has a garden, then two meadows through which winds the Ouse, on the other the public road with its coaches, hurrying on to London; its market people halting to drink, its farmers, horsemen, and foot travellers. So as one's humour is, one can have whatever phase of life one pleases; quietude or bustle, solitude or the busy hum of men. One can sit in the principal room with a tankard and a pipe and see both these phases at once through the windows which open upon either.'

"After tea at the Falcon, and a song . . . they would walk leisurely through Milton Ernest, by the massive church tower of Clapham, and so whistling towards Bedford, while the cry of the cornrake in the meadows mingled with the peevish call of the plover circling over the cornfield, and the westering sun in a sea of violet, grey and silver made silhouettes of them on road and bank." "These Bedfordshire villages, they were Fitzgerald's dear delight, Bletsoe, Sharnbrook, Keysoe, Turvey, Goldington, and the very thought of them sent his blood surging through his veins." Another of Fitzgerald's haunts was Sharnbrook, one of the visits to which is described so pleasantly in the preface to *Polonius*. "I had started," says he, "one fine October morning on a ramble through the villages that lie beside the Ouse. In high health and cloudless spirits, one regret perhaps hanging on the horizon of the heart, I walked through Sharnbrook, up the hill, and paused by the Church to look about me. The sun shone, the clouds flew, the yellow trees shook to the wind, the river rippled in breadths of light and dark; rooks and daws wheeled and cawed aloft in the changing spaces of blue above the spire; the Churchyard all still in the sunshine below."

There was for Bedfordians of the '30's and early '40's to see at times three friends sauntering arm in arm in the High Street and over Bedford Bridge, Edward Fitzgerald, William Makepeace Thackeray, and William Kenworthy Browne. A curious combination, for Thackeray was a giant, Fitzgerald tall, and Browne short and dapper.

I wish I could accept Mr. Wright's theory that Browne was the original of "Pendennis," while Warrington was partly sketched from Fitzgerald, and "Chatteris"—Pendennis' home,—was a mixture of Bedford and a little cathedral town. I believe that none of Thackeray's characters were sketched sufficiently to life for identification, save the Marquis of Steyne, while "Chatteris" is usually credited to be Exeter. It is quite possible that Fitzgerald enters into Warrington, but as no reference is made to it in Fitzgerald's many letters to and about Thackeray, he can scarcely be regarded as the original. When one of Thackeray's daughters asked him, on his deathbed, which of his friends he had loved best, he replied, "Why, dear old Fitz, of course." Tennyson also regarded "dear old Fitz," after the death of Arthur Hallam, as his "best loved friend."

When "Stubby," Fitzgerald's pet name for Browne, married in 1844, and went to live at Goldington Hall, Fitzgerald feared he had lost his friend. "Browne," says he, "is married, and I shall see little of him for the future. I have laid by my rod and line by the willows of the Ouse, for ever. He is married and cannot come." But his fears were vain, the old friendship lasted, and he makes many more visits to "dear old Bedfordshire."

W. K. Browne met with a fatal accident through his horse rearing and falling upon him when returning with the Harriers from Great Barford, on January 28th, 1859, and died after nine weeks' suffering, and so ended an idyllic friendship. Fitzgerald never came to Bedford again. "No more Ouse with doddered willows and sky parting poplars. No more fishing at Bletsoe with Sartor Resartus or Selden as bait, and a paint brush instead of a rod. Bletsoe, Turvey, Keysoe, Elstow, Goldington, adieu!" The music of these names had all departed. "They were nothing without Browne," writes Fitzgerald. "Samarcand shall see me no more."

* * * * *

And so I sit in the Ouse side garden of the Falcon at Bletsoe, "with tankard and pipe," and dream of David and Jonathan seated there long years ago. Fitzgerald is scribbling with a pencil on scraps of paper, and erasing and scribbling again. At last he says, "Listen, Stubby, I think I've got it. Will this do?"

"The Moving Finger writes, and having writ
Moves on—nor all your Piety and Wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a Line
Nor all your Tears—wash out a Word of it."

"Yes," says Stubby, "you've got it, that is old Omar! Don't 'wash out a word of it,' " and English literature will never allow oblivion "to cancel half a line" of the Rubaiyat.

* * * * *

In all his wanderings after Bedford days from 1859 for him "there was no river Ouse, and no jolly boy to whistle the tune away with." Fitzgerald was a true lover of the Ouse. I am pleased to find he shared another taste of mine which I am shy to confess. He revelled in all histories of murder, and was a confirmed criminologist.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIFTH DAY'S VOYAGE. BLETSOE TO BROMHAM. A VILLAGE CHAPEL BY THE OUSE.

"What anxious thoughts have pondered here
The mystery of life,
And prayed the Eternal Light to clear
Their doubts and aid their strife.
They live with God, their homes are dust,
Yet here their children pray,
And in this narrow lifetime trust
To find the narrow way."

—EMERSON.

WE leave the Falcon at Bletsoe, and finishing the first of Ouse's great Bedfordshire loops, come in $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of stream, cleared by German prisoners, to the quaint old Bridge and Manor House of Radwell. Once, when a boy, I voyaged thus far from Bedford and back in one day, a feat of endurance which rather amazes

me to-day.

Radwell Bridge. What a freakish thing is memory! The brain plays us strange fantastic tricks. It seems to take our impressions and pack them away like old photographs, one atop the other in a drawer, and forget them; and then something, the scent of lavender, the sight of a Sweet William, a chord of music, a face, a voice, jogs his elbow, and he tears off to ransack the drawer, and out comes an ancient photo of yourself, aged 5. There you are; your hair in "tunnel," lace collar, belted tartan frock, white socks, and button boots. And so now Radwell Bridge evokes a picture of my childish recollection of the interior of Radwell Wesleyan Chapel, on the Ouse bank, on a hot, sultry Sunday afternoon, some fifty odd years ago, preacher in pulpit, congregation in rapt and devout attention, a picture all vivid down to the wiggly pattern of the graining of the pew-door, which distracted my attention from divine worship. My grandfather, John Howard, belonged to the "Connexion" of John Wesley. His grandmother, born in 1698, had been friend and hostess of John Wesley when he visited Bedford, and among his hearers when he preached that great classic of the Church pulpit, "The great Assize," before the Judge on Circuit, in St. Paul's Church, Bedford. Such godly people in those days attended St. Paul's Church on "the Sabbath morn" of course, and the Meeting House at night "for Grace." My grandfather was a curious mixture of a High Churchman and a Dissenter. He always seemed to me more at home at Church, prayer book in hand, than in a Wesleyan Chapel; but then the layman of those days was bid to be silent in Church, while in Chapel he could voice his living faith. He fasted rigidly every Friday, and was not very approachable on that day. Now-a-days he would have preached "under license of the Bishop," and staunchly upheld high ritual and ceremony. He would have made an admirable Cardinal Pole or Archbishop Laud, for he had no use for Jews, Turks, Infidels and Schismatics, especially some sects of the latter. It never occurred to him that some might consider him a schismatic himself. It all depends which you regard as most important, the raiment itself or the "skirts of the raiment" cut off it; he

would have regarded such a question of his own orthodoxy as a vain and foolish chopping of logic. Howbeit he was on "the Plan" of the "Circuit" of the Wesleyan "Connexion" of these parts as a "Local Preacher." Good Wesleyans will note my knowledge of the technical phrases of the Wesleyan Church. I find it noted in his handwriting that "having been born on 30th January, 1791, a month before the death of John Wesley, and having been married to my wife on 15th August, 1815, by the Rev. J. Hemstead, Vicar of St. Paul's, Bedford, I have preached 2,845 sermons in Bedfordshire Chapels beginning 31st December, 1815." Such voluntary ministry ended within few months of his death in 1879.

From time to time he took me as his companion in his "brougham" to his village appointments on "the Plan." I cannot say it was congenial to my childish liking. His sermons were long, well over the hour. Of their quality I cannot judge, save that their doctrine was lurid, as was the fashion of those days, and delivery dramatic. He was "very acceptable" to the flock. I remember the "Sword of Faith," illustrated in the pulpit by vigorous parry, thrust, riposte, and feint, which would have done credit to Henry Irving, to the imminent danger of the pulpit candles.

Well, to Radwell Chapel we came one hot sultry summer afternoon, when I longed to paddle at Radwell Bridge, instead of being "called upon to hear sermons." In those distant days there dwelt at Radwell Manor House one John Potter MacQueen, commonly called "Squire MacQueen," a lineal descendant of Potter, Archbishop of Canterbury, and something of an aristocrat himself. In the "Connexion" he, as St. Paul says, "seemed to be somewhat," "Society Steward," and a "Pillar of the Church," there sojourning, though rumour ran that the pillar was not so firmly built on the rock of saving grace as it might be. My grandfather once, in my hearing, referred to him as "A brand plucked from the burning," from which you may draw conclusions that he was not as immune from the smell of fire as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in fact, there was a suspicion of occasional "back-sliding," I think my grandfather was stronger in extempore prayer than in preaching. He mapped out his family prayers according to the day of the week. Monday, for Foreign Missions, "for those devoted men who had gone to the utmost parts of the earth," etc.; Tuesday, Home Missions, and so on. It sounded odd, even to my childish ears, to hear his preliminary opening, "O Lord, this morning, *by arrangement*, we pray," etc. For departing guests in his house, he would at family prayers solicit "journeying mercies," sometimes before they intended to journey. Thus once, with a prospective son-in-law, who he considered was outstaying his welcome. If with such a spiritual lever mountains were to be removed and cast into the sea, how much more easily this lingering lover. Such an unveiled hint given personally, in the bosom of the family, and before "the family altar," could scarcely be overlooked by the most obtuse, absent-minded, and love-lorn of swains. He went—prayed out of the house. He would pray at times pointedly and personally for individuals present, as for "thy servant," or "thy handmaid." When this occurred in public a "servant" customarily groaned and interpolated a loud "Amen"; if a "handmaid," she took it with more modesty, or shall I say embarrassment, and hid her spiritual emotion in the shelter of her "poke" bonnet.

I was consigned to the care of John Potter MacQueen, and located in a big square red-cushioned pew. That afternoon my grandfather was "drawn out powerfully in prayer." He "improved the occasion" of a coming execution

at Bedford Gaol; he had a deep interest in such matters, which I fear I have inherited. It curdled my youthful blood to hear of "Thy unhappy servant about to forfeit his life for having embrued his hands in a fellow creature's blood." I identify "the unhappy servant," from the Prison Records, as one William Worsley, who was publicly executed at Bedford Gaol, the last public execution to take place in Bedford, in the spring of 1868. This fixes the date of the following incident, the year being a phenomenally hot one. I was a tender child for such strenuous spiritual exercises. We followed with an appropriate hymn:

When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe
And led me up to man.

John Potter MacQueen nudged me as though to remind me that I was still in the "slippery paths of youth."

The sermon ground on its way, the Chapel was hot and stuffy, a blue bottle buzzed, and I grew drowsy, for there was no "Sword of Faith" to keep me awake. Suddenly I am wide awake; John Potter MacQueen is pulling off his elastic side highlows. They come off with a sound like the squelch of goloshes on a wet pavement, one clattering on the floor of the pew, and there come to view huge white cotton socks, not recently laundered. He rose and removed his broadcloth coat, and hung it over the pew-back, waistcoat followed, collar unbuttoned. Horrified, I thought he was going to bed. Not at all. He reseated himself, wiped a perspiring brow with a large bandana handkerchief, took a long pinch of snuff, and thumbs in his braces, settled himself comfortably down to gain edification from "tenthly and lastly, abounding grace." It did not seem to strike preacher or flock as an outrage on decorum in a "place of divine worship"; they neither blenched at it nor appeared to note it. Child as I was I was scandalised, but I suppose I already belonged to another generation.*

Such things belonged to that day. Churches had not always a regard for decorum. I have seen a clergyman, lacking a vestry, change surplice for the old black gown, and finish his toilette in a looking glass, *coram populo*, at the altar rails. But I speak of ways and uses long gone by.

My grandfather was a dweller by the Ouse at Bedford and his forbears of many generations before him, which must excuse my Radwell digression. I hope no good Wesleyan will deem me flippant and irreverent. I have too great a veneration for my grandfather and the folk who "sat under him" on his John Wesley-like journeys. They were godly people, who strove to walk with God, they wrestled in prayer, they searched the Scriptures, they laid hold on eternal life. May I inhabit one of the "many mansions," however lowly, so it be not very far from such, in the Kingdom.

* A similar incident is told in Wright's "Life of Edward Fitzgerald," of his brother, John Fitzgerald, the coadjutor, and, for awhile, successor of the Rev. T. R. Matthews. He was very eccentric in the pulpit and out of it. "I sat once with him," observes an informant, "in a pew at Bunyan Meeting, Bedford. To my surprise, when the preacher (it was the Rev. John Jukes) entered the pulpit, Mr. Fitzgerald began to undress. He did nothing worse, however, than remove his boots and stockings, and a few minor articles of attire, and empty the contents of his pockets on to the cushions of the seat; after which he seemed comfortable, and thoroughly to enjoy the service, though he unwittingly whistled now and again, but not more, it seems, than usual."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIFTH DAY'S VOYAGE. RADWELL TO BROMHAM.

TO THE OUSE.

"Slow winding stream, how stilly dost thou glide,
'Twixt level meadows of a charming green,
Wherein pied cattle and white sheep are seen,
And brilliant flowers gleam out from either side
Like sparkling jewels on a beauteous bride;
While silvery pollards o'er thy margin lean,
Like grey hair'd men of venerable mien,
Holding low converse o'er thy listening tide,
Beneath whose waves disport the bream and dace,
And little minstrels pipe within thy bowers;
Where dragon flies their prey do fiercely chase—
On, on thou flowest, like the gliding hours—
Save when arous'd by floods—at equal pace
Fed by earth's ceaseless springs and heaven's blest showers."

—W. B. GRAHAM (Sharnbrook), 1861.

I HAVE vaunted the joy of going barefoot for four days. I have miscalculated the power of the sun this sub-tropical Whitsuntide, for I have received sun burns almost equivalent to scalds, and am compelled to go, like Lord Chatham, "swathed in flannel."

From Radwell the Ouse describes an almost perfect "S" shaped course to Stafford Bridge, and on the left bank, where the lower semi-circle begins we shall pass Milton Ernest. The river here seems at one time to have played a great part in village life. While Domesday Book records one mill let for 20/-, there were four mills in 1639, and five in 1734. It has always been famed for bream fishing. In 1372, Sir John Basset's fishery brought in 12d. per annum, while fisheries attached to the three Manors of Harnesse (Ernest), Bassett, and Ball, find mention in the 16th and 17th century, and formed no small item of their revenue. As I shall presently refer to Cauldwell Priory as a typical Ouse side monastery, it may be noted that the Prior of Cauldwell held land here, including a hermitage and a grange, for the Coroner Rolls (Selden Society) state that, in 1271, Simon of Langenhoe, when about to milk a cow belonging to the Prior of Cauldwell, at his hermitage and grange in Milton Ernest, received a "mau del flaunke," from which he immediately died.

We pass Milton Hall as $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Bletsoe. The unusually long spillway from the weir to the Mill shows that the five mills mentioned must have stood very close together, and were all served by the main stream parallel with this spillway. Stafford Bridge, which crosses the river at the lower end of the "S" loop, was described by Lysons in 1807 as having a causeway of thirty-five arches passable for carriages, but without a fence, a dangerous place for a winter night, but now the river is spanned by ugly iron girders, and only two arches, with stone ribs and wooden beams survive of the mediæval bridge. The name is, of course, a corruption of Stratford, a paved way, traces of which have been found crossing the meadows direct to Pavenham.

This was a favourite fishing place of my boyhood, when invited by the Tuckers of Pavenham Bury. I once had a lively encounter with a monster eel hooked from the bridge, who coiled himself round one of the bridge stones in the pool below the bridge. I descended into the water to drag the monster from his lair, and was nearly drowned by getting a foot wedged between two stones, but I was the survivor of the struggle. But there, I am shy of fishing stories I could tell. I am convinced that though I believe myself scrupulously truthful in all else, my pet fish catches tend to grow larger and more ferocious as I grow older, and I have eliminated them from the repertoire of my anecdotalage.

My opponent at Stafford Bridge was, if I remember rightly, about three feet long, and four or five pounds in weight; while a length of five feet, weighing twelve to fifteen pounds, is not uncommon. Isaac Walton quotes an eel caught in the Nene at Peterborough in 1667 as one and three quarters of a yard, while a catch at Norwich in 1839 of twenty pounds, presumably eight feet long, must have damped the courage of swimmers in those parts, lest they shared the fate of Laocoon.

It is on record that not many years ago a large eel was captured in a pond near Sherborne by a labourer, who noticed a swan in difficulties. The bird had put its head under water, and this had been seized by a monster eel, who would not let go until captured and landed.

It is strange that eels as a comestible, like tripe, raise an instinctive shudder in the minds of many who have never tasted either, while both are most delicate dishes.

On our right in the meadows by the river an old City 'bus, whose busy life was spent on a round, which I dimly decipher, included the Old Kent Road, has retired to spend a peaceful age in retirement here. Briar roses climb the stair which once busy city men ascended, and branches of hawthorn bush occupy the knife board. Its inside passengers will be from time to time a bathing and fishing party; an ideal rest from the rush and turmoil of life. The bosky woods of Pavenham Bury stand sentry on our right bank. Pavenham, which discreetly retires some quarter of a mile from winter floods, still retains one of the few surviving ancient industries of the river. They ply a thriving trade in osier baskets of every description, and in rush matting. I have told how the rush pedlar of my youth has long vanished, but I cannot but think that the rich lush growth of river rushes should be turned to some general purpose and profit. To our forefathers rushes served in place of carpets, which must excite the envy of persons about to furnish in modern days. They were dusty, no doubt, but warm to the feet, and cheap. Anciently it was customary to renew the rushes on the floor of churches near the time of the dedication festival, which is still done at Ambleside, Westmoreland, on the last Sunday in July, the church being dedicated to St. Ann, whose day falls on July 26th. Our flower Sundays are modern adaptations of this ancient observance. And then the canoes sweep round to a long direct run of the river which is to carry us past Stevington on the right, and Oakley on the left, to Clapham. It is a broad, deep, stately stream as fine as Tyringham, but that meadows cannot lend the same grandeur as the trees and sloping vistas of Tyringham and Gayhurst. A ferry boat gives access to Stevington. I should like to step ashore and look at the Holy Well, which was once of high repute and sanctity. And some kind soul, hearing of my voyage, has sent me a photograph of a field close here curiously ridged as if for raised

seats. Locally it is called the "Seeds," a corruption, I suppose, of the Latin "*Sedes*," and I imagine it was once a rude amphitheatre, possibly for jousting tournaments, as one Baldwin de Wake built a castle here in 1281. But the Colonel has ordered dinner for 7.30 sharp at the Embankment, Bedford, and he is a punctual man, and we have an Ouse bank call to pay at Oakley House, the seat of Lord Amptill, who had conditioned his free pass to me with a kindly invitation to his hospitality as we pass. I almost tempted him to join our expedition from Brackley, for he is a good waterman, as needs must be "Six" in the Oxford boat 1889-90-91-92. On the way up to Oakley House, C.B. suggests that the Ouse and my book should be kept out of the conversation as "shoppy." Unfortunately, "King Charles's head" *will* obtrude, and a chance turn of talk launches me down the water-shoot of the Ouse, anent Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter Scott, in his "Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft," cites the details of a case of determined persecution of a woman about sixty years of age at Oakley, near Bedford, in 1707. The case is remarkable for the fact that the woman, anxious to free herself from suspicion of witchcraft, asked to be submitted to the test of ducking. Sir Walter says that the parish officials so far consented to this "humane treatment" as to promise the woman a guinea if she cleared herself by sinking. The woman was tied up in a sheet with her thumbs and her great toes tied together, and then by a rope fastened round her waist she was dragged three times through the river Ouse. Each time, though her head was under water her body floated, doubtless owing to the air contained in her sheet and clothing. As she did not sink there was a general cry to drown or hang her, until at length it was suggested that she should be weighed against the Church Bible. This test saved the poor woman, apparently to the disappointment of many of the crowd.

As we stroll round the beautiful garden and grounds I am particularly interested in two ancient fish "stews," which are now being cleared of surrounding trees and mud deposits, and are once more to be the haunt of carp and other edible fresh water fish. The kitchen recipes in Oakley House of long ago had recently come to light, and baked pike, stewed eels, and broiled tench, figured largely in dinner menus of the period, ere fish trains brought sea fish inland. My host and I discuss river fish.

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One of the most important items of the national food supply until the close of the Reformation period was provided by the extensive fisheries. Rents of mills and fisheries figure largely in Domesday Book and in old manorial records. Our ancestors, apart from navigation, regarded rivers as "mines of wealth," and legislation on the subject extends from Magna Charta to the Freshwater Fisheries Act, 1892. The decay of river fisheries dates from the reduced demand after the Reformation. A still more vital cause was the Public Health Act of 1848, compelling Urban authorities to use rivers as sewers, under a system of sewer drainage in lieu of cesspools, and this at the same time encouraged manufacturers to increase their pollution by authorising them to use the local drainage systems for the discharge of their refuse. Anyone who has seen that Stygian tide—the Irwell at Manchester—finds it difficult to believe that it was a pellucid stream with fish in it within living memory. Artificial manures on land, tarred roads, the withdrawal of large volumes of water by public water systems, the neglect to clear the obstacles and weeds from river courses, and, above all, the absolute oblivion of the

ancient art of pisciculture, have all combined to destroy what was once a national staple supply of food, which fish trains from the sea now supply at proportionate cost.

I was greatly surprised to hear that on 29th May a great shoal of fine bream, estimated at 200, averaging 3 or 4 lbs., was to be seen wallowing on the surface of the Ouse just off Bedford Bridge. Such a sight is rare and peculiar; I have only seen it once in Norway, when, while fishing from a boat, suddenly a great shoal of large trout rose and played round the boat, so that I could actually tap them on the back with my rod. C. Tate Regan ("British Freshwater Fishes") says "the spawning of bream takes place when the fish assemble in shallows near the shore and splash about at the surface, the eggs being deposited on the weeds to which they adhere." The same phenomenon was seen at Harrold Bridge on the same day—again bream. At such times fish utterly disregard any fisherman's lure. It is curious that they should select such public places.

It would seem as though fish were seized at times with a devouring curiosity to see the manners and homes of human beings. Like the little Mermaid, who loved the Prince in Hans Andersen's charming story, and stole up from the sea depths and lingered beside riverside palaces and gardens and watched with wondering eyes the play of human life, so perhaps fish are drawn by some irresistible impulse to shoal in so unlikely a place as a noisy town bridge. Similarly, in 1902, an otter was seen playing in the river off Bedford Bridge. And so to boat again.

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A beautiful place, Oakley House, and fortunate in its dwellers, ever since that good woman, Adeline, Duchess of Bedford, a "Mother in Israel," lived there as a youthful Marchioness of Tavistock, in the late '70's.

* * * * *

Shortly after, disaster overtakes us. A recent evil omen marked the Colonel for catastrophe. Two hours ago, at lunch, it was found his only bottle of beer had popped its cork in the heat and reduced his lunch to a mash of beer and Ouse, garnished with the debris of a knapsack. C.B. and I had lowered our canoe over the waterfall below Oakley House, and in following us somehow the Colonel's canoe went broadside over the waterfall and turned turtle in the pool. We rescue what will float, but an eight-guinea camera and all his slides lie at the bottom. The gallant man prepares to dive for them. I dare not go in with sun-scorched feet like boiled lobsters, but I am still admiral, and will be obeyed. I know these waterfalls. Nearly always a ledge of rock gives an abrupt fall into deep water, and a back current hollows out a cavernous chamber below the ledge, and to get in one such where probably the camera lies is a dangerous position. And so it proves when he walks the ledge shoulder deep and dangles a leg over the edge to find it hollow and a strong current sweeping into the cavern. So a precious cargo is lost, and this book will be the poorer in its pictures.

The old stone 5-arched bridge of Oakley has a flood mark showing how a disastrous flood in 1823 rose 16ft. above the normal level. A record of the flood is given on the fly leaves of an old Bible belonging to an Oakley family: "Oct. 31st, Nov. 1st, 1823. A very high wind and snow and rain; a very great flood in the River Ouse, which ran over the parapet walls at Oakley Bridge; a great many sheep drowned, and other cattle: A

haycock, about 14 tons weight, swam out of the meadow at Bromham, and left in a meadow of Mr. Golding at Biddenham, standing upright as it was built; a deal of damage done to the corn in the barns of Mr. Chapman at Oakley; it was in his house nearly five feet deep."

In another $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles we reach Clapham, almost on the outskirts of Bedford, but meanwhile the air has grown sultry, and swiftly mustering clouds come up. Since Bletsoe I have ever and anon eased my paddle to consult the Rev. W. Monkhouse on the etymologies of the various villages ending in "-ham," or in "-ton," which we are passing. Here at Clapham my faith in him finally breaks down. After quoting various Teutonic dialects to prove that "Clap" means a noise, citing Flugel as defining it to be a "Deckel befestige," calling in the aid of French and Celtic, he finally quotes Chaucer who in the Merchant's Tale says of "scandre wives" that they

"Aye clappeth like a Mill."

He leaves it in doubt if the said noise from which he derives the name proceeded from some mill at Clapham or from the wives of Clapham. If the latter I consider it a gross libel as I have known and held in high esteem several of them. I must abandon the Rev. W. Monkhouse as a philologist; I suppose I ought to study the learned Skeat, but really I don't feel called upon to put every Ouse village through its catechism. I am no longer "A Schoolmaster Abroad."

We land at Clapham and seek a village inn for tea. We might stroll home and get it, despite the voyage is still $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles. English inns are strange places. The first inn cannot give us tea for there is no fire; the second, advertising a tea garden, possesses no tea. So we sit down to ginger ale which neither cheers nor yet inebriates. The storm lowers thick overhead and reacts on one's nerves. The memory of Edward Fitzgerald's love of murders, and the sight of Bromham Woods ahead remind me of a grim tragedy of the past and I start to thrill my crew, to raise the hair upon their heads like "quills upon a fretful porcupine" with murders grim. While my grasp of most fields of human knowledge is shallow and superficial, of murders and crimes I am a profound student. If anybody doubts it, let him ask my good friend the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire. Did I not accompany him on his first official visit to the Black Museum at Scotland Yard, and expound its horrors to him, and have I not ever since supplied him with literature, discussed crime and generally supervised his training in this branch with careful tutelage? Of course I have, as he will tell you. And so I give the crew this for their sombre thought on Bromham Woods, now looking gloomy under the brewing storm. A Bedford Prison Record runs thus: "Matthew Lilly, aged 28, and William Lilly, aged 19 brothers, for shooting at one Thomas Kay and wounding same at Bromham with intent to murder, both sentenced to death, both executed on 4th April 1829" J. H. Mathiason, Mathematical Master of the English School (now Bedford Modern School) in a very good little History of Bedford, published in 1831, says, "on the 4th of April, 1829, two brothers were hanged pursuant to their sentence, the one for firing at a gamekeeper who continued to molest him in his retreat, though warned of the consequence, and the other for instigating him to do it. These men whose poverty and want of employment might have seemed some excuse for their poaching, by the present law could have none for their using firearms. Their fate excited the most lively interest in Bedford and, notwithstanding the number of persons assembled to witness the wretched

spectacle, horror and disgust were visible on the countenances of every respectable inhabitant, and a 'legal murder' was the frequent appellation of the revolting sight."

Such severity is the more inexplicable, as though on an average 10 death sentences were annually recorded at the Bedford Assizes, they were nearly all commuted for terms of years on the "Hulks," and from 1801 to 1878 only 17 executions have taken place in Bedford. The said gamekeeper, Thomas Kay, who, rumour ran, only received one pellet, if any, lived to a green old age within the memory of living men, while these two poor lads went to their doom.

The crew are now "murderously intent" and "ask for more" like Oliver Twist, so "we talk of graves—of worms and epitaphs," and I draw on my Grandfather's recollections and tell of how, a quarter of a mile or so from where we sit, the three cross roads where Offa Street (absurdly altered to Tavistock Street), Clapham Road and Union Street, used to be called "Black Tom's Corner," and I remember it so called in my boyhood, because one Black Tom, a negro suicide, was buried there with a stake driven through the body as was the gruesome custom with suicides a hundred years ago when nice questions of mental psychology had not yet arisen, and suicide was *felo de se* and theft was theft and not kleptomania. And now I am in full career and tell how just across the golf links yonder, a fashionable site of aristocratic villas, the corner where the Bromham Road turns out of Bedford towards Bromham was of yore called "Gallows Corner" and still so in my memory, and how my Grandfather remembered seeing a man hang there in chains, for it was the place of public execution.† Since writing the above, anxious to verify the certainty of my Grandfather's recollections, I searched a most interesting manuscript volume in the Shire Hall Muniment Chamber, namely the records kept by the governors of Bedford Gaol from 1801, when the Gaol was built, to 1878. I find this entry: "1801 at the adjourned Midsummer Session it was ordered that the old gallows at Biddenham be taken down as useless." "1802 at the Epiphany Session it was ordered that a stone staircase be erected at the lodge of the Gaol for convicts to ascend at the time of Execution." The first quotation settles my Grandfather's recollection. He was born on the 31st January, 1791 and therefore was a boy of nearly eleven years old when this gruesome object disappeared. The gallows is marked in Jefferies' Map of Bedford, 1765.

I may add that he must have seen people pilloried in the High Street, and publicly whipped on the Market Place. In 1806 occurs this entry: "At the Michaelmas Session John Olney, for assaulting sundry persons, three calendar months imprisonment and then to be publicly whipped and to stand in the pillory one hour between 2 and 4 p.m., which sentence was duly carried out on the 17th September."

It is strange how our forefathers loved to perpetuate such gruesome events in local names, and though later I mean to protest against the vandalistic obliteration of ancient Bedford names, to wit Offa Street, Potter Street, etc., I can scarcely plead for Black Tom's Corner or Gallows Corner. Mrs. Smythe Tompkins would feel aggrieved if postally associated with Black Tom, while

† Here, on March 26th, 1605, was hanged Gamaliel Ratsey, the most notorious highway-man of Shakespeare's time, who long terrorised the Eastern Counties. He once delivered an interesting lecture to a company of players whom he held up and robbed, and among whom there is reason to believe was Shakespeare himself. He was a hero of chap-book literature of the period. (Shakespeare's "England," vol. i, p. 208).

that distinguished Anglo-Indian, Major Bagstock, C.B., would indignantly repudiate "Gallows Corner" as his address.

* * * * *

But there, "I have supped full with horrors," as Macbeth has it.

C.B., though enthralled by this gruesome recital, protests against its insertion in this book. But I am firm. Why should an author forego his pet hobby-horse just because his theme is something totally different—which he cannot treat half as eloquently as he can murders. It may be an "excrescence" as C.B. calls it. Well, let it "excresce."

* * * * *

And so aboard again. We are close to Bedford, for I could land and in ten minutes be in my study; but what a curious river the Ouse is! At this point Father Ouse seems to say to himself, "Here is my favourite town, I will not hurry. If I flow straight through it they will empty their slop pails into me and bespatter me with cabbage leaves and orange peel and paper bags, and I shall leave it below Bedford Bridge all smoke and dirt-begrimed. Why should I hurry? I will creep along westward past the shady banks of Bromham Hall and I will peep at the Bridge at Bromham and talk with the miller at Kempston and so will I come to Bedford Bridge in tidy, cleanly raiment." And so this laggard river is to carry us away again from home and entice us round a great bend of seven miles and land us at Bedford Bridge scarcely a mile and a half from the point we are starting at.

Fuller, speaking of the serpentine course of the Ouse, observes that it runs 80 miles in a distance of 18 by land, and then humorously remarks, "Blame it not if sensible of its sad condition, and presaging its fall into the foggy fens in the next county, it be loathe to leave this pleasant place as who would not prolong their own happiness."

And so we paddle under the Midland Railway Bridge, the last of seven great viaducts which Ouse costs the Midland Railway from Sharnbrook, and here we are skirting the Bedford Golf Course on our left, and there is old Jones driving off at the 4th tee. Good heavens what a pull! We almost duck our heads in expectation of being hit. Jones comes stumping down into the "rough" on the bank with fiery face and sulphurous language.

"My dear Jones," say I, "if only you can pull a boat as well as you pull your golf ball, for heavens' sake step in and give us a hand to Bedford."

Jones: "You think yourselves ——— funny."

I: "My dear Jones, Dr. Johnson observed that 'every man some time in his life has an ambition to be a wag.'"

Dr. Johnson is consigned to a region which I hope he is not inhabiting.

I: "By the way, Jones, is that not your golf ball floating down stream over there? Shall I" but there, I see my misplaced facetiousness will provoke bad blood and language. To be chaffed in the middle of a medal round by two idiots in a canoe is exasperating. I start off to say that I was only "pulling" his leg, but I suppress this untimely levity, and give "the soft answer which turneth away wrath," though to provoke wrath in the first place is silly. We land and help Jones search for the errant ball, find it, and see him off to the fourth green mollified. You see we had not spied a single soul to speak to since Oakley and we hailed old Jones as Columbus must have hailed the first human being on Watling Island; he was the outward sign and symbol of our voyage nearly accomplished and civilisation regained.

But here the storm bursts, and it is in drenching rain we paddle the length of the beautiful park of Bromham, where guelder roses are in full bloom, and pass the quaint, rambling old hall. In my youth we never dared to steal by here in a boat, save in the early morning or the late of the evening, for there dwelt here a stern lady, the Hon. Miss Rice Trevor, who had no use for boating folks intruding in her domain. She, like Miss Betsy Trotwood in pursuit of the donkey boys, would have rushed out of the drawing-room window and screamed herself hoarse at us for trespassers. Meanwhile, I tell C.B. how this was once the home of that sturdy old royalist, Sir Lewis Dyve, and of how in July, 1642, his truculent Roundhead neighbour of Cople, Sir Samuel Luke, came over and sacked Bromham Hall, and Sir Lewis Dyve had to make his escape by swimming the river, though I am pleased to read that "he wounded his opponent five times"—the sturdy soul. Sir Lewis Dyve was captured at Sherborne in 1645; he was brought to the Bar of the House of Commons, where he refused to kneel until compelled, and was then committed to the Tower for high treason. He seems to have been good at escapes, for he managed to escape from the Tower, as the record says: "Making a safe conveyance thence though through a common *shore*, and so beyond the sea, where he continued with his Majesty during his banishment."

As we come to the waterfall of the spillway the rain suddenly stops, the storm rolls away, and again it is bright sunshine, turning the water of the overshoot to the tint of molten gold and lighting every leaf and blade of grass as with tiny lamps aglow.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER VILLAGE CHAPEL BY THE OUSE.

"Fount of the Chapel with ages grey,
Thou art springing freshly amidst decay.
Thy rites are closed and thy cross lies low,
And the changeful hours breathe o'er thee now.
Yet if at thine altar one holy thought
In man's deep spirit of old hath wrought;
If peace to the mourner hath here been given,
Or prayer from a chastened heart to Heaven;
Be the spot still hallowed while time shall reign
Who hath made thee nature's own again."

—HEMANS.

WE come to Bromham Mill, and the ancient long stone bridge, with its side recesses for foot passengers. Why Bromham claims the bridge, seeing that the last four of its 26 arches are in Bromham parish and the rest in Biddenham, I know not. For long centuries it always was "Ye Brydge of Biddenhame," and why change its ancient name?—save that this modern age, like Gallio, "cares for none of these things."

I watch with interest a fisherman nervously playing a fine chub he has just hooked. It must have been a guileless fish, for he cast his fly like a pebble and now handles his rod like a pitchfork. Vainly I bid him keep his rod up and give him the but. "Alright, my man, you've lost him, and serve you right. He broke you just because you let him get a straight pull on your line in the weeds by keeping your rod down. If you had shown him the but, as I told you, the play of your top joint would have quieted him. You'll know better next time; it is always bad fishermen, like you, who hook the biggest fish—and mess them."

Bromham (I beg its pardon) Biddenham Bridge was in olden days a very elderly and reputable person, with a good banking account, possessing a Chantry of St. Mary and St. Catherine, "the Chantry of Biddenham Bridge in Bromham Parish," founded in 1295, "for the safety of travellers who were in danger of thieves," standing above a holy well, to which sick folk much resorted for its healing qualities. Quite by way of being a landed proprietor, this bridge and chantry, like Bideford Bridge, as Kingsley tells in "Westward Ho!" once owning two acres of meadows let at 4/-, a quarry pit let at 6/8, and a grovette (whatever that may be) let at 5/-.

The Colonel and C.B. go off for a bathe, and I, with my crippled feet, wander off, where I have not been since I was a boy, down the worn steps to the holy well beneath the last arch at the Bromham end. I light my pipe and sit down on the lowest step, where shade broods cool, well out of the hot sunshine that beats down above, and I watch the still pool, shaped like a miniature Roman bath. Its water, some three feet deep, is clear as crystal, and delicious as I lap it up in my hand. Now and then a slight tremor runs across its surface as the subterranean spring gently feeds it.

Long paddling in the heat, silence (save for a passing cart overhead), the

monotonous rumble of the mill wheel and the fascination of that clear pool cast their spell; my pipe goes out, and I sleep—and there come to me “visions of my head,” and phantoms of sleep.

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Daylight has faded, and I am blinking at two candles burning before an image of the Virgin and the Child, on the wall, above the well. High above my head I see a stone-fretted roof, and from the floor above the stairs two men and a woman and three children are looking down into the well, while a deep voice is concluding with a sonorous “*per Eundem Christum Dominum Nostrum. Amen.*” There is a stir above, the sound of feet, and I turn my head to look. At the stair head stands a white robed priest with a child in his arms, one little acolyte behind with a silver dish and a phial, another with a lighted candle and a white robe over his arm, and a third holds before the priest the Office Book. I know in my dream that I am about to watch the Rite of Baptism of Holy Church. Prayer and Response go on as the Priest breathes three times upon the child’s face, signs the Cross on forehead and breast, takes the blessed salt from the dish and puts it on the child’s lips. “*Epipheta*” be opened, and moistening his finger tip he touches ear and nostril. The oil of Catechumens is put on breast and shoulder. Presently the acolyte gathers up the priest’s vestments, and holds them tucked up, and the priest steps barelegged down into the holy well. “*Johannes, ego te baptizo in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti,*” and three times he dips the screaming child and three times makes the sign of the Cross. Heedless of screams and an anxious fussy mother craning down from above, he gives the Chrism on the head, takes the white garment from the acolyte, and wraps the child therein, puts the lighted candle in the little blue shivering fist of the child, who clutches it, and screams again as the hot fat falls on his arm.

The woman is half down the stairs, eager to seize the poor dripping, screaming bantling thus painfully regenerated—“*Ex aqua et spiritu sancto,*” and to cosset and hug him to her breast. The priest gives the last “*Vade in pace et Dominus sit tecum,*” and is gone.

And then I hear tap, tap against the stone work of the stair. An old, half-starved, blear-eyed hind, with shrivelled leg drawn up at the knee, is hobbling down the stairs, his crutch scrabbling on the steps, balancing himself with hand against the wall. I watch him painfully lower himself into the water; he struggles to one knee, leaning himself with one hand against the wall, crosses himself, and tells his beads, muttering the while as he glances up to the candles and the gently smiling Mother and the Child. And then the scene is all gone like a moving film.

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Anon, slowly, as though my sleep were long, I became aware of noises overhead. There is a crash above, and a splintering noise of breaking wood and glass, and loud voices. I climb the stairs into a little plain built Chantry, with a tiny Chancel behind the rood screen. A ladder stood against it, and a man is sawing the feet of the wooden Virgin, gazing up at where the Cross and Crucified One had stood on the rood screen. This latter it was which had fallen and splintered on the pavement, as I had heard. A man in velvet flat hat and plume, black doublet and hose, sits at a table with an inkhorn before him writing in a book, fingering some silver chalices and a patten, while a jewelled silver crucifix in a leather case lay on the table, with some legal

looking documents. A servant was holding up for his inspection a magnificent vestment of shimmering gold with orpheys, embroidered with arms, which he fingers. He dips his pen in the inkhorn and inventories "One Cope of Gold Bawdekin." I glance over his shoulder and see him write: "Peter Wayver is Incumbent here, of the age of 70 years, but meanly learned, and hath no other living but the revenues of the said Chantry." The rasping saw goes on, the mill wheel groans, and the pen scratches. The loud voices outside suddenly fall silent, and then a cracked, quavering voice, as of an old man, begins to sing, and the words come clear to me, "Christ crucified," and then voices join in, a deep base, the soft notes of women, the piping trebles of children:—

Christ Crucified.
 For Thy wounds wide,
 Us commons guide
 Which pilgrims be
 Through God his Grace,
 For to purchase
 Old wealth and peace
 Of the Spirituality.

And then sounds as of weeping and shouting. The man rises impatiently from the table, gathers up his papers, gives an order to the servant, and shouts a last direction to the man up the ladder.

"Godbody," he angrily exclaims, "I must get through this business quickly; I must end with these hymn-chanting hindes. It is a little job. There is Cauldwell to-morrow, and still Greyfriars and Newnham next week, and Master Cromwell is urgent." He strides to the West door, where I follow and stand behind him on the top step. The singing quavers to an end "of the Spirituality," and the crowd stands hushed and expectant of something coming. He addresses them in a loud voice, "Good people of Bromham, I am Dr. Thomas Layton, the King's Visitor under Commission of Master Thomas Cromwell, and under Seal of the King's Grace, His Highness King Henry VIII. —whom may God have in his keeping. I am come to enquire into the conduct of Religious Houses and certain abuses, ill doings, and heresies, which it hath come to the ears of His Grace have crept in thither, by superstitions and wiles of the Devil."

And then he unrolled a sheepskin parchment, with its dangling lead seal, which his servant handed him. In front of the villagers stands an aged priest, a black mantle over his white cowl. His face is gentle and refined. Now and again a hand comes from under his scapular to wipe away a tear which will trickle down his furrowed face, or to nervously finger a twitching lip. Behind him villagers and their dames, with wide-eyed children peeping curiously from behind their skirts, listen in dead silence. I hear the opening "Le Roy le veult," and then, in a rapid voice, which the mill wheel half drowns, Dr. Thomas Layton perfunctorily gabbles through the scroll; I catch little of it for the groaning mill wheel, save now and again some words reach me, as "whereas," "whereby," "in pursuance of" something about "messuages" and "idolatrous images." But the wheel suddenly stopping, I hear the concluding words: "Which by devising and phantasing wayne opinions of purgatory, and by the abuse of Trentalls made for continuance of such blindness and ignorance." And then he removes his plumed hat, and in a loud voice cries, "God save His Highness King Henry VIII." It is over. He mounts

his waiting horse, and followed by the servant, gallops away over the bridge to Bedford.

I watch the dust of his departure creep like mist over the bridge parapet. And there is the priest kneeling in prayer on the stone steps: "O God, why hast Thou cast us off for ever? Why doth Thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture . . . ? Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old . . . the Mount Zion wherein Thou hast dwelt. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axe and hammer. . . They have defiled the dwelling place of Thy name to the ground. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name for ever?" The crowd stands gazing down at the prostrate agonised form; a woman climbs up from the well, a pannikin of water in her hand, and gently raises the grey head now bowed upon the stone steps of the Chapel, and bathes the white brow and wipes the writhing lips as though "she did it for his burial."

They break up in groups, talking loudly; "The Chantry, so Peter Sowler has heard, is to be down by Saturday 'sennight.'" John de Ockli has offered 8/- for the stones and timber, for his new byres, by the river near "ye brydge of Ocklei." "What would good Father Peter do?" "Go back to Cauldwell?"

* * * * *

I suddenly wake up, seated still on the lower step, and retrieve my pipe, which has fallen into the well. I glance back into the cool well, where a few stray leaves are floating on the limpid surface. Poor little well! You played your part for untold centuries, a part of dignity and virtue as a "Holy Welle." Priest, pilgrim, highborn knight and lady, beggar, cripple, leper, have passed up and down your steps and worn them hollow, as I see them to-day. Countless babes of Bromham have been laved in your waters, and come forth screaming, but "regenerate of water and of the Holy Ghost."

I think I must have been asleep and dreamt about you.

I believe I have been dreaming. My guidebook tells me a Chantry once stood above you, and refers me to the Royal Victorian History of the County. I must look you up. You appear to have fallen on evil days. I suppose you were a little back eddy in the stream of Reforming Iconoclasm some four hundred years ago. The old bridge still stands, children still lean over the parapet to watch the water churn from below the mill wheel, the river still flows on, carts and carriages and motors lumber overhead, and folks pass to and fro above you, and the world wags on, and—

"God fulfils himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

And who recks or heeds you? or even knows that you are here? Yet your crystal water sleeps its eternal sleep, its bosom gently dimpling and heaving with the soft inflow of deep waters, just as you were in the days of your fame and holiness. Good-bye, little well!

* * * * *

I climb the steps out of the cool shade into the blazing sunshine. The Colonel and C.B. are sitting smoking on the wall of the mill race after their dip, and meditating the churning stream, watched by curious children from the bridge. "I think I have had a doze," I say, "down at the well. Have I been long?" Ten minutes only! Dear me, I thought I had slept a long while. Come—on board again. It is a long stretch to Kempston Mill, and dinner waits us at Bedford.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT LADY AT HER OUSE MANOR.

"And over me unrolls on high
The splendid scenery of the sky,
Where through a sapphire sea the sun
Sails like a golden galleon.

"Towards yonder cloudland in the west,
Towards yonder Islands of the Blest,
Whose steep sierra far uplifts
Its craggy summits white with drifts."

—LONGFELLOW.

WE voyage along the reach below Bromham Bridge, passing on our left that charming vista of Biddenham Church, with Mr. Whitworth's fair seated house and garden, and surrounding buildings nestling in its shadow. Here, where the stream divides just opposite, forming the "Backwater," as it was called when I skated there as a boy, staying with my Uncle Charles Howard at Biddenham Manor House, stood, no doubt, the Biddenham Mill recorded in Domesday Book, as "Bideham Mill in the half hundred of Buchelai," rented at 25/-, but no eels. I suppose the two mills of Bromham just above, recorded as rented, the one at 20/- and 125 eels, and the other at 40/- and 100 eels, took the cream of the fish and left Biddenham but skim milk.

I am reminded by the bronze water lily leaves—they are always bronze as they first come to the surface—that we have missed just one, and only one, of the beauties of the Ouse, viz., its water lilies, like alabaster cups, which will shortly adorn this reach in great profusion. Pass down stream in the early dawn of a summer's day. Bevvies of water lilies, with closed petal eyes and drowsy drooping heads, like river Naiads asleep, lie abed. And then, as the first flash of the morning sun touches them, they stir and stretch their arms, lift their heads, and open their amber eyes, and begin the toilette of the day, and lo! the river syrens in full glory, smile sweetly, and give you "good morning" as you pass. So sensible is the lily to the rays of the sun.

And then, as if nature in generous mood repented of having denied us this one beauty of our voyage—the water lily—she substitutes a glory of the heaven in its place, and as aftermath of the storm, the evening sky takes on the tint of opal, pearl, and amethyst, canopying above us, and mirroring back from the still water a gorgeous pavement, as for our feet. Only the pen of Ruskin can give word to the sight, for he saw the pageant as no other eye can do—

"Yonder war clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon crested, tongued with fire, how is their barbed strength bridled? What bits are these they champ with their vaprous lips, flinging off flakes of black foam? Leaguered Leviathans of Heaven, out of their nostrils goeth smoke, and their eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Where ride the captains of their armies? Where are set the measures of their march? Fierce murmurers answering each other from morning until evening, what rebuke is this which hath awed them into

peace? What hand hath reined them back by the way in which they went? Verily knowest thou the balancings of the clouds, the dwelling place of light, the wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge? "

These hemispheres of cloudland are ever infinite and unexplored, the eye travels no beaten track or highway there, but roams the infinite and lingers brooding on the eternal.

So on a peerless evening we near the end of the first part of our voyage.

" The whispering waves are half asleep,
The clouds were gone to play,
And on the bosom of the deep
The smile of heaven lay.
It seemed as if the hour were one
Sent from beyond the skies,
Which scattered from above the sun
The light of Paradise."

The wide meadowlands somehow bring back to mind my appreciation—when a child in my Ouse side home—of the 23rd Psalm, as taught me in the Scotch Lyrical Version. How charmingly it lilts!

" In pastures green Thou leadest me
The quiet waters by."

As we near Kempston I am for calling on my good friend the miller of Kempston to ask after the health, wealth, and good repute of Kempston. For I am very jealous of the same, for was I not once Chairman of the Urban District Council, ex-officio J.P. of Bedfordshire, with all dignities and appurtenances of my office? And did not we City Fathers inaugurate a Water System, for which future generations will rise up and call us blessed, though be the truth said, the then generation rose up but not to bless!

But the sight of Kempston Manor House, close to the Ouse beyond the Mill, distracts my thoughts to a book on which I have recently hit. And so I must needs sit down on the brick wall of the waterfall opposite the Church and tell my recollections gathered from Wentworth Hayshe's charming book, of a great lady who once worshipped in yonder Church, when she "lay" at her favourite manor of Kempston, Dervorgilla, Lady of Galloway, of Balliol, of Fotheringay Castle, and of broad lands in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, and Huntingdonshire, Countess of the latter, and Founder of Balliol College, Oxford. I am going to tell of two great ladies who sojourned on the banks of the Ouse, one as here—happy in life and peaceful in death—the other, later, unhappy in life and brokenhearted in death. So of Dervorgilla, Lady of the Manor of Kempston, nearly 700 years ago, a right noble Ousite.

To tell the high estate of this great dame would be to trace the lineage of great Saxon Earls, of Plantagenet and Scottish Kings, and Angevin Princes. Enough that she was of the direct blood royal of Scotland, granddaughter of David, Prince of Scotland, and Earl of Huntingdon. Other forbears were the illfated Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, Huntingdon, and Northampton, betrayed to his death by his wife Judith, niece of the Conqueror, who founded the great Benedictine Nunnery of Elstow close by, "to salve her conscience." The Abbot of Crowland, who gave sepulture to Waltheof, called her "that most wicked Jezebel." Leofric, Earl of Chester, and the Lady Godiva, were among Dervorgilla's forbears. Plantagenet Kings must needs greet Dervorgilla as "Our dear sister," for she descended through Adeliza, sister of the Con-

queror, and mother of Judith. Through these, and through her father, Alan the Magnificent, Lord of Galway, she was Lady of Galway, and Countess of Huntingdon in her own right, and possessed vast lands in Scotland and the Midlands. Here, on the Ouse, among the possessions in the three midland counties which descended to her from Judith, was the Manor of Kempston, a favourite seat of hers. At twenty years of age she married John of Balliol, Lord of Barnard Castle, and of wide demesnes in England and in Picardy. They were a princely pair.

It would seem to have been an ideal marriage of love, for he was a brave and skilful warrior, and a pious, generous giver, and their tastes ran together. Of all the great buildings and benefactions of these two, Balliol College most interests us. It began, strangely enough, as a penance on John de Balliol. A quarrel arose in 1255 between him and Walter Chirkham, Prince Bishop of Durham, described as "little in person, but in mind very large and devout." The Bishop was victorious on appeal to Henry III., and the proud John de Balliol in penance submitted his back to the scourge of the Bishop at the door of Durham Cathedral. The Bishop went beyond the scourge, and demanded an act of charity, viz., the establishment of a Hostel in Oxford for sixteen poor scholars, who should receive from John's coffers each 8d. a day. It was this humble beginning which Dervorgilla in her widowhood endowed and developed into Balliol College, inditing its statutes with her own hand.

In 1268 John de Balliol died, and was buried at Barnard Castle, and Dervorgilla mourned her loved companion for 22 years of widowhood. It is a touching, pathetic picture, as told by Andrew Wyntoun in his metrical chronicle of Scotland, of how she had the heart of John Balliol embalmed and enclosed—

" Into a coffyn of evore (ivory)
The which she gert be made before,
Ennammelit and parfitly dicht
Lokkit and bunden with silver brycht."

He tells the story of how, when she sat at table, "the coffyn" was set before her, and she made her reverence to it. Lordly dishes were served before the empty chair of the beloved John, and then "delt among pore men." She gave strict word in her Will and Testament that this "coffyn" should be placed upon her bosom "when thai shud mak her sepulture." Against the time of "her sepulture" she built and endowed the great abbey of the Sweet Heart or Dulce Cor by Dumfries—Newstead Abbey, as it came to be called.

One can picture Dervorgilla sitting in her bower, hung of tapestry, with her ladies, a window overlooking the back quadrangle, where grooms and hindes and servitors and waiting-maids went to and fro. A fire burns on a central hearth, the smoke going up to a roof louvre: "Full sooty was her bour and eek her halle," as Chaucer writes. Now and then she would bid a maiden command the men in the *domus* to make less clamour. As the "Eddie songs" of the IXth to the XIIth century picture such a scene, "the lady sits with her maids, working the tapestry with figures of swans and beasts and ships and heroes, fighting and sailing," as Matilda worked the web of Bayeux, the while a lector would read aloud the life of some saint or "romaunce" of Amadis of Gaul. And then spurred, mud-splashed messengers would arrive bearing letters from learned clerks of Oxenford, about some suggested alteration in the Statutes of Balliol College. Now came one from distant Dumfries with plans of the Presbytery and drawings of corbels, or a design of capitals, for the

rising Abbey of Dulce Cor; or an agent from Fotheringay to submit tablets of rents and veneries. And business done and letters written, with "the coffyn" in her hand she would follow the seneschal's procession to Hall for Meat, and standing above the salt, make reverence to "the coffyn," placed before the empty chair of the beloved John, and after Meat distribute the dishes to "pore men" at her gate.

In the afternoon perchance she would ride in her brocade tilted four horse wagon along the pleasant road to Elstow to call upon Beatrice de Scotenay, the Lady Abbess, and to pace the Cloisters and talk of Judith, or more profitably of holy things. The evening fine, she would stroll with her ladies and pages along the meadow path by the Ouse, to hear Compline in the Parish Church of Kempston. Next morning, she is rowed in her barge to the Bridge of Bedford, where await her her palfry and company of verdurers, and so away to hawk with the Lord Prior of Newnham, or to hunt the stag with the De Beauchamps of Bletsoe.

The author of "The History of the Sheriffs of Galloway" writes of her: "With much acceptance she reigned as Queen of the hearts of all her subjects, for twenty years devoting her energies to the establishment and development of the resources of the Province, her rule and her works bearing equal evidence of her tact, her taste, and her sense of responsibility." A very great lady this, sojourning in 1289 by the Ouse at Kempston.

And there, on the 21st January, 1290, died the great and good Dervorgilla. The Chronicle of Lanercost thus records:—

"In the year of our Lord 1290, on the Feast of St. Agnes, passed from this world the noble dame, the Lady Dervorgilla, widow of the Lord John of Balliol. A woman great in wealth and in lands, both in England and Scotland, but much greater in nobility of heart, for she was the daughter and heir of the magnificent Alan, once Lord of Galloway. She was buried at Due Quer (Doux Cœur) in the monastery of the Cistercians, which she had herself built and endowed."

* * * * *

She was "felix opportunitate mortis," happy in her death, for she was spared seeing many troubles befall her loved Scotland, and her loved only son, John de Balliol. In 1285, Alexander III. of Scotland, riding a fierce horse at Kinghorne, was thrown over the west cliff "so rudlie that he breake his necke and so therewith immediatilie died." We know from school books of how in 1289 the heir of Scotland, the Maid of Norway, set sail from Norway, and from the hardships of the rough passage died at the Orkneys. But St. Agnes' Day had already passed, and no messenger came to bring the news to Dervorgilla that John, her son, stood next to the throne. In July, 1292, John Balliol was chosen King of Scotland. Of his long struggle with Edward I., how in 1296 he surrendered his throne, and was carried captive to London, and subsequently died in exile at the Château Gaillard in Normandy—called of Scotchmen "Toom Tabard" (empty jacket), of Wallace's struggle with the "Hammer of the Scots," and of all the days of blood and agony of Scotland, this is no place to tell. Happily, the news of it never reached Dervorgilla beside the Ouse at Kempston.

The Kempston Road has never witnessed, nor will again, such a scene as the solemn procession which started that winter day of January, 1290, conveying the body of the great lady, with her "sweet silent Companion," in the "coffyn of evore," laid upon her breast, from her Manor at Kempston. There would be the stately four-horsed bier, draped in purple with a great pall em-

blazoned with the four scutcheons of Balliol, Galloway, Chester, and Huntingdon, as seen on her seal. Knight and squire, pursuivant and man-at-arms, would ride in attendance with the ladies of the Chamber, and servitors. At the long wall of the Precinct of Cauldwell Priory, as it stands to-day, the Lord Prior, one William le Dypre and the Black Canons, would cense and asperse with Holy Water the bier, and so, amid the tolling of many bells, through lines of respectful onlookers, to the first of many bridges to be crossed, Bedford Bridge. Thence again, with the respectful homage of Mayor and Bailiffs and Burgesses, and the blessing of the Lord Prior of Newnham, at the head of many ecclesiastics, the great Lady Dervorgilla passed across the Ouse on her last journey. Through long wintry days the solemn procession wound slowly northwards, by many a bridge and river ford and town and village, until it reached the last bridge, the great Bridge of Dumfries, "Dervorgilla's Bridge," across the Nith, which she had built with Pontife skill, the sole survivor of the great buildings wherewith John and Dervorgilla enriched the Royal Burgh of Dumfries. It still stands, after 650 years, defying winter flood and storm. The long travel which began on the banks of the Ouse ends at last on the banks of the Nith, and there they bury her with solemn rite and requiem in her Abbey of Sweet Heart, or Dulce Cor, with the "Coffyn of evore, enamellit and parfitly dicht," upon her breast.

The stone of her tomb, so Hugh de Begh, Prior of Lanercost, records, bore this inscription : †

*"In Dervorgilla moritur sensata Sibilla
Cum Marthaque pia, contemplativa Maria.
Da Dervorgillae requiem, Rex summe, potiri
Quam tegit iste lapis cor pariterque viri."*

Dulce Cor is now a stately ruin. There is no trace of tomb or inscription. Shakespeare writes :—

*"The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones."*

Often it is true, but not always, and such an exception is Dervorgilla de Galwedie et domina de Balliol. She wrought no evil to live after her, and the good of her life lies not buried with her and "the coffyn of evore." Often in my Oxford college days I was a guest in Hall at Balliol College, and, standing in view of the pictures of John de Balliol and Dervorgilla de Balliol, "founders of this College," listened while the appointed scholar gave the Latin grace.

* "Funde quaesumus, Domine Deus, in mentes nostras Gratiam Tuam ut Tuis hisce donis a Johanne Balliolo et Dervorgilla uxore caeterisque omnibus benefactoribus nostris rite in Tuam gloriam utentes in vitam una cum Fidelibus omnibus resurgamus per Jesum Christum Dominum Nostrum. Amen."

*"Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust."*

† "In Dervorgilla dies a sage Sibyl
Contemplative as Mary, pious as Martha.
Grant rest, O Supreme King to Dervorgilla,
Whom this stone covers together with her husband's heart."

* "Pour forth, we beseech thee, O! Lord Thy Grace into our minds that, using aright unto Thy Glory these Thy gifts bestowed upon us by John Balliol and his wife Dervorgilla and by all other our benefactors, we may along with all the Faithful, rise unto Life through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen."

CHAPTER XIV.

A LITERARY "SNAG" IN THE OUSE.

"And I loved her and our troth we plighted
On the morrow by the river shore;
In a fortnight to be disunited
By a bitter fate for evermore.

"Oh my own, my beautiful, my blue-eyed!
To be young once more and bite my thumb
At the world and all its cares, with you, I'd
Give no inconsiderable sum."

—CALVERLEY.

TO our paddles again, and here on our right is dear old "Williamson's Spinney," spreading its umbrageous trees over the stream. What heart among old Bedfordians but must quicken its sluggish beat at sight of you? Haunt of our youth, of countless river picnics, scene of our many flirtations! How often must Father Ouse have stolen by with a wink and a chuckle as he scanned the spinney, a cautioning finger and a gentle "cave." "Now, my dear, hush gently, I have just seen mamma waking up from her nap beside the luncheon baskets; she is about to stroll this way. A *leetle* more behind that bush, if you are wise. Good-bye, my dear!"

Shades of my youth! Why, yes, that is the actual old tree where—I wonder what's become of dear Rosey, whether she still keeps that twinkle in those blue eyes—I suppose her ringlets must be grey by now—and those dimples in her cheek, or was that Amelia who had the dimples? I did once hear that she was married and lived at Brixton, and was a grandmother of a wide cast clan. No, by the way, that was Arabella. Dear child! Cynics call it "Calf love," but does life ever give us anything again so sweet and innocent and charming as "Calf love." And so, my dear Arabella—or Rosey—or Amelia—or—I'm not quite sure who the other was—I do hope that the happy man, your husband—your "another"—rows you occasionally on some river, as I did, and gathers you posies of cuckoo flowers and forget-me-nots as I did, and that there is some kindly old tree upon the banks beneath whose obliging canopy he kisses your dear old face, as I—ahem!—just for "auld lang syne."

* — * * * * *

The sight of C.B.'s shoulders hard at the paddle dissipates my day dreams.

I think it would be well *not* to submit this page of my MSS. to his criticism. I am too well aware that in the eyes of modern youth such Mid-Victorian parents as myself are supposed to have been born, like the "Precocious Baby," in the Bab Ballads, already aged, possibly married and father of a family; or, like Athene, to have leapt all armed from the head of Zeus. That they ever flirted in "Williamson's Spinney"—of course, it is unthinkable. I am quite prepared to admit the truth of it all, but I do not wish to expose

myself to ridicule and have the truth rubbed in, like brine into ham. No! I will send this page of the MSS. to the printer surreptitiously.

* * * * *

And here are old familiar waters redolent of my boyhood. "The Rapids" are past, the old, once stately mansion of the Boteler's-Ford End, long come to low estate, once a "Poor House," and now a cottage tenement, peeps at us as we pass Honey Hill. And here is the Osier Island and Cox's Pits. Who Cox was and why he had pits I do not know, and I never met anybody who did; possibly he was one Coax, a neolithic Ousite, who lived in his pit or cavern on the bank. I throw out the suggestion for historic research. There, on that corner bank, as I tell C.B., I first learnt to swim. According to the Latin grammar example, "Nare est facile," to swim is easy. Well, it may be to your modern boys and girls, who are cosseted along on a pole and a line, under the watchful care of an instructor of swimming, lest they get a mouthful of water, and suffer from catarrh of the larynx, in consequence. But mine was a sterner school. I remember my grandfather's old coachman, one Briton by name, being ordered to teach my brother—the late Sir George Farrar—and myself to swim. We were aged, I suppose, six and five. His method was simple; he tied a rope round our waists, and hove us one after the other into the river, whence he retrieved us as "one draggeth a drawnet."

Or a little later, here at "Coax, his Pits," one Joseph Marshall continued our natatory education. I see, in memory's eye, a row of little youths in nature's garb, we four brothers, and possibly a Howard cousin or two. The said Joseph passes behind, and seizing each one of us in turn by the ankles gives him the necessary somersault toss in the air, with a last exhortation to straighten the back and not come down flat on the water; vulgo, a "gutter." That process, my reader, if you have experienced it, leaves behind it a sensation of having fallen flat on a mustard plaster and stuck there. And yet am I grateful for the wisdom which ordained this childish discipline—Spartan though it was—for without it, living as children with the river all round us, we should have been drowned many times, if it is possible to be drowned more than once.

* * * * *

And now a very serious obstacle bars my voyage, the very snaggiest of snags in the current of my literary stream. C.B. and I hold earnest parley thereon. It is this: We have reached a portion of the Ouse as familiar and descriptively threadbare to Bedfordians, as is Piccadilly to Londoners. From here through Bedford to Newnham, it has been photographed and sketched black and blue. It has been written up in house agents' catalogues and Bedford guide books and railway carriages *ad nauseam*, and been flirted over by couples numerous as the sand on the shore. I cannot just write "Here is the Shire Hall," and "Here Bedford Bridge crosses the Ouse," "Here is the Town and County Club, whose membership includes the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood," and "Here is the Embankment, one of the most umbrageous riverine promenades in England," and so on in full "journalese" career. It is obvious to the most obtuse that they all are "here," and will continue "here," whatever I may write about them, or not write about them. C.B. and I confront this literary barrage over meditative pipes. He suggests that it were best to leave a blank page with asterisks, and begin again at Newnham. I consider this suggestive of those mystic crosses appended to lovers' letters. A page of asterisks: well, really, it would look as though I had intended to

write something indelicate, and had refrained at the last moment from a sense of "*pudeur*." I am reminded of the *Times* criticism of an edition of Samuel Pepys' Diary—"full text"—published some years ago: "We note the occasional use of asterisks by the Editor. Considering how much of the full text the Editor has had the courage to print, our wildest imagination fails to conceive what his asterisks conceal." I wonder what the Editor thought as he scanned the literary column of the *Times* that morning?

I cast again, and an idea strikes me. It used to be a golden rule for bad whist players, in those distant days when whist seemed as eternal as Mt. Blanc, "When in doubt lead trumps." Now, when I am perplexed how to express some literary thesis, I swaddle it up in a metaphor or a simile; I run that metaphor for all it is worth until it breaks its back, as all metaphors do, if you gallop them too hard. So here, "when in doubt I lead a metaphor" to solve this vexatious literary problem. Still haunted by memories of Rosey and Amelia and Arabella, and—I forget her name—my metaphor assumes a somewhat sentimental shape, as thus wise.

* * * * *

I imagine Jones, after long years of interval, meets Robinson, erstwhile friend of his youth and rival in the early affections of Mrs. Jones, née Selina Smith. Naturally, Robinson makes enquiries after Mrs. Jones—he even refers to her as "Selly," as to how she looks and how she wears—the Selina whom he has not met since that painful hour when Robinson learned that she loved "another," but would be as a sister to Robinson. Now, how does Jones frame his answer? Does he describe Mrs. Jones as she *is*, double chinned, toupéd, shapeless, and in expansive heelless cloth boots? Certainly not. Why give occasion to Robinson to rejoice that Selina *did* love "another," in that painful hour which I have described? No, the wily, and, I believe, uxorious Jones draws a picture of Mrs. Jones as she *was* when he led her to the hymeneal altar—blushing, ringletted, willowy-waisted, fairy-footed. Why not? "Not changed a hair, old chap, worn wonderfully, quite girlish!" and let us hope the good man believes it. In the locket on his watch chain he has a picture of Selina thus, and the other panel of the locket shows little Selina, a sweet, smiling curly-haired maiden of five, long before she ever met Jones, loved him, and proposed to be a sister to Robinson. The good man shows them both with fond pride to Robinson. "There never was such a child, a bride and wife as Selina, and never would be." "Come and dine next Thursday, 7.30." Selina will be delighted to see you. By-bye, Robinson; be up to time."

* * * * *

I fling myself upon the neck of my metaphor with relief and gratitude of heart; even C.B. sees a solution of the difficulty. *In primis* I will write several chapters upon Selina as Jones first knew her; otherwise chapters upon the Ouse at Bedford as it was known to me 50 years ago, when I loved it first. Those chapters will serve as a prologue, and "let the prologue seem to say" to my readers—"Now I have explained to you all I know about the river at Bedford as I knew it, and as the Ancient Mariners knew it." And then I will write chapters descriptive of Selina long before Jones or Robinson knew and loved her; in other words, I will write two chapters as though I had voyaged upon the Ouse in the year of Grace 1230 A.D., six years after the fall of Bedford Castle, and two chapters of the year 1533 and 1541, and I will try and show how men lived and how things wagged upon the banks of the Ouse in those

olden days. My first batch of chapters on the Ouse 50 years ago will give all necessary explanations, and spare the reader eruptive footnotes, that they may read with understanding the pseudo-Froissartesque narrative of the later batch of chapters on the Ouse in olden times. Thus I shall not need to oscillate backwards and forwards between the XIIIth, XVIth and XXth centuries, which, unless I possessed the magic carpet of Prince Hussein in the Arabian Nights, would be as awkward a position as the coffin of Mahomet suspended between heaven and earth. Hence, there is here an interlude in the voyage.

I append here our calculations on the much vexed question of the length of Ouse, especially of the distance within the confines of Bedfordshire, which I have alluded to in Chapter III., where Fuller estimates it to be 80 miles, Spede 90 miles, and Jeffries 45 miles, from just above Turvey to St. Neots. In Bedfordshire I have calculated from village to village.

DISTANCES.

<i>From</i>		<i>To</i>		<i>Miles.</i>
Farthinghoe ...	...	Brackley	...	7
Brackley ...	...	Buckingham	...	20
Buckingham ...	...	Stony Stratford	...	16
Stony Stratford ...	...	Newport Pagnell	...	12½
Newport Pagnell ...	...	Olney	...	9
Olney ...	...	Lavendon Mill	...	4
Lavendon Mill ...	...	Turvey Bridge	...	4
Turvey Bridge ...	...	Harrold	...	4
Harrold ...	...	Odell	...	1¾
Odell ...	...	Felmersham	...	2
Felmersham ...	...	Sharnbrook	...	2
Sharnbrook ...	...	Bletsoe	...	1½
Bletsoe ...	...	Radwell Bridge	...	1½
Radwell Bridge ...	...	Milton Ernest	...	2¾
Milton Ernest ...	...	Pavenham	...	2½
Pavenham ...	...	Oakley	...	2½
Oakley ...	...	Clapham	...	1¾
Clapham ...	...	Bromham	...	3
Bromham ...	...	Kempston	...	2½
Kempston ...	...	Bedford	...	2¼
Total ...				102½

Col. Young appends this note:

"In all cases the measurements embodied in this list have been carefully measured from the one inch, and in some cases, especially in Bedfordshire, from the six inch ordnance map, with an allowance of one-eighth to cover the very intricate sinuosities of the river, which cannot be shown on any map of the above scale. It should be borne in mind that in boating a course more irregular than the river is necessary to avoid reeds, rushes, snags, fallen trees, and even nesting swans. But the above is, in my opinion, an accurate estimate of distance."

Hence, with regard to Bedfordshire, as the county boundary crosses the river above Turvey Bridge, the distance to Bedford is 30½ miles. The distances beyond Bedford are officially given in "Bradshaw's Canals and Navigable Rivers of England and Wales." This gives Bedford to St. Neots as 16 miles. Hence 30½ + 16 = 46½ miles—the length of the Ouse within Bedfordshire.

Bradshaw gives the distance from Bedford to Kings Lynn as 74 miles 6 furlongs *viâ* the Hundred Foot. Its natural course *viâ* the old West River, the Ely River, the Ten Mile River and Denver Sluice, to Lynn, according to Bradshaw, is 10 miles 7 furlongs longer, viz., 85 miles 5 furlongs. Hence the total route of the river by the Hundred Foot is 177 miles 4 furlongs, and by the natural course of the Ouse 188 miles 3 furlongs. In the latter course, its original length has been shortened some eight miles by Sandall's Cut, between Ely and Littleport.

In the recent Parliamentary Committee on the Ouse Drainage Scheme learned counsel, despite my protests, was officially "instructed" to give the length of the Ouse as 147 miles, which I hold to be 41 miles 3 furlongs short of the actual length—a rather serious error to commit in "Instructions." But there, only the Colonel, C.B. and myself have ever journeyed the distance, except some oolite man may have been swept down the torrent in his dugout or on an ice flow. But we three are not to be "instructed." We *know*.

CHAPTER XV.

A PRIORY BY THE OUSE.

"In ruin stands lone in the solitude,
The wild birds sing above it, and the ivy clings around,
And under its poppies its old time worshippers sleep sound.
Relic of days forgotten, dead form of an ancient faith,
Haunting the light of the present—a vanished past's dim wraith."

—ANON.

FAMILIAR to all Bedfordians is the Ouse-side house in pseudo-Italian style called Cauldwell Priory, as occupying the site of the old Priory of Caldwell or Cawdwelle. As seen from the river a high blank wall connects the house with an immense tiled-roof, wooden barn, 88ft. by 22ft., which gives upon a somewhat spacious stable yard surrounded by ancient stone walls. In my boyhood, when it was familiar to me as the residence of my cousins, the Nutters, it was a very charming place, with a spacious garden then extending over the present site of Messrs. Howard's Foundry. The firm's impending extensions have recently swept the gardens out of existence, and turned the house into an office.

The history of the Priory has attracted little or no attention. Dugdale's "Monasticon," apart from giving a woodcut of its seal and three Latin documents, knows nothing of it.

Lysons, in his "Magna Britannia," written in 1806, gives the following short notice of Cauldwell Priory:

"Caldwell or Cawdwelle Priory, about a quarter of a mile west of Bedford, on the banks of the Ouse, was founded in the reign of King John, by Simon Barescot or Basket, alderman of Bedford, for brethren of the Order of the Holy Cross or Holy Sepulchre, and was dedicated to the Virgin Mary; Robert de Houghton gave the site. The founder conferred the patronage of this convent on Roger le Mareschal. It passed afterwards to the Latimers and Uffords.¹ The order of the Holy Sepulchre falling to decay not long after the establishment of this monastery, it is probable that it was replenished with Austin Canons; for at the time of its suppression by Henry VIII. it was stated to be a priory of the last-mentioned Order, and was then dedicated to St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. Its yearly income was stated to be £109 8s. 5d. The site was granted in 1563 to Thomas Leigh,² whose descendants continued there in 1620.³ In 1682, it was the property of Edmund Gardiner, Esq.,⁴ who had a seat there, which has been pulled down many years ago, and a farmhouse built in its place. The estate continued in the Gardiner family till about the year 1780. It now belongs to George Livius, Esq. Traces of the conventual buildings may be seen in a field adjoining the farm-house."

1. Dugdale's Monast.

2. Tanner.

3. MS. Diary of Th. Archer, rector of Houghton Conquest.

4. Monument of his daughter-in-law, Mary Lysons, in St. Mary's Church.

This notice of Lysons' is a good instance of how a casual visitor to a spot may write down the most inaccurate statements which finally pass in the next generation as established facts. He states that it was founded by one Simon Basket, alderman of Bedford. He cannot even accurately translate a Latin document which says "*ex funditate antecessorum Simonis dicti*," viz., "on the foundation of the ancestors of the said Simon." John Leyland, who lived in the reign of Henry VIII., stated it was founded by a de Beauchamp, who, however, could not have been the Simon de Beauchamp who "lieth before the high altar" of St. Paul's Church, as it was founded before his date. Lysons then states that the site was granted in 1563 to Thomas Leigh, but his dates are hopelessly wrong. The Rev. P. W. Wyatt has lent me an ancient indenture, wherein William and Ann Gostwicke of Willington, to whom the Priory and lands were granted on the dissolution in 1535 by Henry VIII., for the period of 21 years, make over possession of the same for the remaining period to Thomas Leigh for "four score pounds of lawful money," under indenture dated 14th September, 1546 (see Appendix V). Mr. Henman has lent me the original indenture, 10th November, 1628, wherein Lewis and Lucy Leigh sell the property to Dr. Henry Atkins, of London, Physician in ordinary to King Charles I., Peter Paradine of London, Lewis Conquest of Houghton Conquest, William Newton of Biddenham, and Richard Godwin of Bromham, for the sum of one thousand pounds. The old Bedfordshire family of Gostwicke settled at Willington, lower on the Ouse,* where our canoe will visit later, was high in favour with Henry VIII. as staunch supporters of Protestant principles. Sir John Gostwicke was Master of the Horse to Cardinal Wolsey, and later to Henry VIII., and I shall tell later of Henry VIII. holding a Council at Willington. He was the "Visitor" who carried out the dissolution of Elstow Convent. No doubt the grant of the suppressed Priory of Cauldwell to William Gostwicke, the brother, was a reward of a staunch Protestantism.

Another indenture, under the 20th April, 1640, transfers the property again. As to Lysons, almost the only dependable statement is that it formerly belonged to George Livius, who is well remembered by persons still living, by whom it was sold to Messrs. Howards. His statement that "traces of the conventual buildings may be seen in a field adjoining the farm-

* Sir John Gostwicke. Part of the Manor House of Sir John Gostwicke survives at Willington, together with a stone pigeon house of the same date, 1529, see page 127.

Bedfordshire Notes and Queries, Vol. II., page 184, gives the Will (dated 16th May, 1543) of John Gostwicke, of Willington, the elder, in the Co. of Bedford, "Knyght and Treasurer to the Kings Maistie of his first fruts and tenths of the Spualtie" (Spirituality). Proved the 4th May, 1545, by William Gostwicke, Arm., the natural and lawful son of the Testator. Another Gostwicke Will of the 15th July, 1541, mentions "young William Gostwicke," no doubt the son of Sir John Gostwicke, while William Gostwicke of Cauldwell is named executor. This William Gostwicke of Cauldwell appears to have been brother of Sir John, and to have succeeded him at Willington in 1545, and is the drawer of the document quoted in Appendix V. His Will (28th July, 1547) alludes to "the Chamber nere unto the said Chapell where Kinge Henry VIII. of famous memorye of late laye therein called the Kinge's Chamber." Proved the 16th June, 1550, by Ann, the relict, and Edmund Pyke. This reference to Henry VIII. visiting Willington is explained in Chapter XXII. William Gostwicke obviously sold Cauldwell on succeeding to the Willington estate in 1545, possibly also having an eye to eventualities in case of the death of Henry VIII. He died in 1550.

Thomas Leigh, to whom the property was sold, appears to have been a member of the suite of Sir John Gostwicke, for in a document of 1566 he states "that from the XXIX. yeare of the raigne of King Henry VIII. until the daie of the dethe of Sir John Gostwicke he was for the most parte restaunt and abydinge with the said Sir John Gostwicke."

house " is even more inaccurate, and shows he could never have visited the site with any care. Owing to this garbled statement Historical Societies and Antiquarians have passed Cauldwell Priory by as considered of little interest and its conventual buildings swept away. As a boy I used to think of it as a stately pile akin to Furness Abbey, and pictured to myself mullioned cloisters, stately refectory, and the fretted vaults and aisles of its chapel, long vanished. Of late I have been making investigations, assisted by the architect of Messrs. Howard, Mr. Dawtrey, and Mr. Huckle, owing to the fact that Messrs. Howard are making very large extensions, and trenches are being driven in every direction. So far, apart from human bones in what was obviously the graveyard of the Priory at its eastern side, and where many bodies were discovered forty years ago, no trace of buildings has so far been found. When one particular trench was dug without result, in a spot where I anticipated finding foundations, my dreams of former grandeur began to vanish.

I am indebted to Mr. Huckle, of the Britannia Works, for the surveyor's plan of the Cauldwell Priory estate, when purchased by Messrs. Howard in 1852. It shows some features of special interest. There appear two fish ponds with their entries partially silted up, also a fish stew. The eastern boundary of the Priory lands was no doubt the King's Ditch. A charter of Henry III. (quoted in Dugdale's "Monasticon") defines the limits of the Priory lands, "*quae extendunt in longitudine ab eodem loco usque ad viam quae venit ad Houton usque ad Newbrook*," viz., "extend in length from the same site to the road which leads to Houton as far as the New Brook." The road leading to Houton would be a continuation of the road to Ampthill issuing on the Kempston Road, opposite Cauldwell House, now obliterated by the railway. The New Brook is undoubtedly the King's Ditch. Appendix VIII. shows that the Prior of Cauldwell was accused of filling in a portion of it, while the name Pilcroft in the Indenture, given in Appendix V., survives in Pilcroft Street, which skirts the King's Ditch. It is obvious from the surveyor's plan that the first grant of the site by Robert de Houghton was some 600 feet, measured from the river, and that the Kempston Road exactly follows the contour of the river at this distance, from the King's Ditch to the garden wall of Cauldwell House, thus confirming the statement of the Charter of Henry III. Mr. Dawtrey and I carefully examined the old stone wall which extends along the Kempston Road. It is, of course, the southern wall of the Priory precincts, which originally extended eastward and westward to the limits mentioned. Like all such ancient walls it has no foundations, being built directly on the soil, and in many places shows the herring bone pattern and clay used instead of mortar. Owing to disturbances by tree roots it is much less perfect than the wall of Cauldwell House garden, the western boundary. The map of 1830, shows much the same features as to-day, save that the house which preceded the present Italian villa structure was a small farm-house, with the same vast barn and yard on its west side, and this my mother remembers as the residence of Thomas Trapp, the banker, who used to take his dip every morning of the year in the Ouse, and was a martyr to rheumatism in his old age as a consequence.

I determined to make a thorough examination of the house and out-buildings. I knew that if any remains of the Chapel still survived it would stand, as customarily, on the north side, viz., next to the river, thus giving shelter and sunshine to the cloisters and garth. I first surveyed the huge

barn, which has always been considered part of the farm buildings referred to by Lysons. Its wooden walls rest on obviously ancient stone foundations. Two curious projecting recesses, 12.6 ft. by 5.6 ft., at the back of the building, puzzled me. At first I thought, with my exalted views of the vanished Priory, that this wall was the foundation of the western wall of the Chapel, and the recesses marked the lintels of the two western entrances. But then it suggested a Church 88ft. wide. Puzzled, I tried another venture. I proceeded to the cellar of the house itself, and then daylight began to dawn on me. The house itself is built on ancient stone walls going down to some 12ft. below the surface. There is an outer wall of the same depth, which leaves a passage-way broad enough to walk in. This passage, which evidently went originally all round the building, is now interrupted and stopped on the east end of the house, and partially interrupted by a partition wall upon the west end. This was obviously so constructed as a catch-water to prevent the building being flooded, as well as to give light, and had the builder of the present house, which rests on these walls not blocked any portion of it the cellars would never have been flooded, as they always were within my memory at every flood. And then suddenly daylight came to me—I was standing in the crypt of the Chapel, merely divided into rooms for modern convenience. Its solid walls are 50 ft. long and 40 ft. broad, and above this stood the Chapel, a somewhat insignificant building for a Priory. I was disappointed at its size. Then occurred to me the income of the Priory at the Dissolution—£109, a small sum, even if reckoned at ten times for its modern equivalent; also I remembered the “four score pounds of lawful money,” and the “thousand pounds” given in the two indentures quoted. I had definitely located the Chapel, where, of course, it would be, on the northern side, giving protection from the north wind, and leaving the sunshine for the garth. I then went back and again studied the long barn. The high wall which connected it on the northern side with the house was evidently ancient, as were the various walls surrounding the yard. The barn was divided in half, no doubt originally by a wooden partition but partially, save in the roof, replaced by modern brickwork. The northern half was open to the roof. The southern half was divided into three rooms and had an upper story with two dormer windows; in the roof the wooden partition dividing the upper room from the open roof of the other half still exists. The heavy beams were of oak, most of them roughly shaped with the adze and many of them crumbling with the flux of centuries. And then suddenly I see things in a new light. This is no farm-barn—it is the actual Priory precisely as the monks left it in 1535. Those two puzzling projections? Why of course the wide settles of two hearths. There are the orifices where the smoke escaped closed by two decaying hinged shutters. The fire would of course be placed, not inside, but in front of these projections with a timber hood over it, the smoke drawing in to the shuttered orifices when the wind allowed of it. Probably these chambers behind the fire were used for smoking meat and fish. On scraping the lime and hair substance which coats the wall of one settle, I found it thickly impregnated with soot. It was all plain. Here at the northern end was the lofty open roofed refectory or “fratry.” The upper story at the southern end was the dormitory or “dortor.” At those dormer windows the monks shaved and tonsured themselves in haste as the bell rang for “*the Missa Familiaris*” at 6 a.m. Beneath were the kitchen with its hearth and settle and probably the “Pitanciers” office for distribution of alms and food; the third room, next the refectory, the buttery. The settle of the

refectory still retained the ancient plastering which no doubt originally lined the whole building. Standing above in the dormitory, with its ancient rough hewn oak beams, and looking down into the refectory I could see the clear inception of the college hall. Here the beams though still roughly hewn, had been worked to far greater symmetry than in the rest of the building, and efforts had been made to give it some dignity and proportion which it still retains after all the lapse of centuries.

And then everything else fell into place. The stable yard was the garth. The high wall parallel to the river and connecting the barn and house was the northern cloister wall, intact, with two windows giving on the river, shuttered as probably they were originally, with lean-to roof, as at present, forming various sheds. I trace the wall along towards the house and there to my amazement I find a little square projection, 12ft. by 12ft., obviously the truncated portion of a humble tower to the Chapel, under which the monks passed from the cloisters to the Chapel. The other walls of the yard of course bore the eastern and southern cloisters, the latter with a square recess where once stood another building, probably the Cellarer's Room, and immediately behind it a dovecote which I remember in my youth. I was somewhat confounded by the result. The Priory had never been a stately place as I dreamed. It was a poor shabby, mean little place. Its main conventual buildings had been wooden walled, its cloister merely lean-to roofs. Its Chapel, there at least they had built solidly, only 50 by 40ft. Probably the home of not more than 20 monks, half farmers, half devotees. All that that sturdy Protestant William Gostwicke did, I feel sure, was to convert the Chapel into a little dwelling house for his agent to live in, lower the humble tower in accordance, use the conventual buildings as a farm barn, turn part of the cloisters into farm sheds and clear away those which were useless to make a farm-yard. Why should he have done anything else? He was not going to leave the stately mansion at Willington to live in this poor place, and he valued it all, with its land, merely at "four score pounds of lawful money." Lysons talks rubbish about "a seat" having been built here and then a farmhouse. Not a trace of foundations has been found anywhere. Could I have seen the farmhouse which my mother remembers, I should, I am convinced, have found the original Priory Chapel, adapted into a little dwelling house and its truncated tower carrying the water cistern as it does still. So ends my dream of stately cloisters, and yet I rejoice over that humble little Priory. I am no antiquarian or archæologist, but I am prepared to submit my conclusions to those who are, without a shadow of misgiving.

The present house built sometime in the 40's on the Chapel foundations is the only "seat" there has ever been since the original Chapel. The rest of the Priory stands practically intact; there is even the sewer way or piscina through the northern wall of the cloisters, close to the refectory, by which they flushed the refuse into the river. The refectory was always built as far as possible from the Chapel to avoid culinary smells, as here.

Since writing the above, builder's trenches have been dug in every direction and, as I suspected, nothing has been found, nor will be found, unless it be of a lodgehouse at the end of the entrance avenue to Kempston Road.† Lysons' statement that "traces of the conventual buildings may be seen in a field adjoining" is pure and unadulterated invention. If he ever visited the site it was all there under his very nose, as in fact it has been under mine unwittingly for fifty years. Odd how just because things are familiar to us we

† This site has since been dug without result.

never give them a thought. By the way the Priory Holy Water Stoup stood for many years in the garden of Cauldwell House, and is now in the garden of Abbey Close, Bedford.

The recent excavations have struck a spring so plentiful that it has to be carried into the river by large pipes. Hence the name "Cold-Well." The same excavations show the clay gradually shallowing upwards from the river to the surface, evidencing a time when the river was a wide estuary of some 200 yards across. Any description of the Ouse would be incomplete without reference to at least one of the conventual establishments of its banks, such as at Harrold, Stevington, Newnham, etc., and my reason for selecting Cauldwell Priory will be obvious in my next chapter.

* * * * *

Further investigation leads me to believe that an obviously ancient cottage abutting on the Kempston Road and within the walls of the Precinct, now occupied by Mr. Marshall, was the Guest House, and probably the Entrance Lodge. Another ancient cottage in the garden of Cauldwell House, just beyond the Precinct, possibly lodged the Monastic servants.

* * * * *

I give the few other details available as to the Priory, compiled from ancient documents for some of which I am indebted to the Royal Victorian History. As to the date of its foundation the Priory was existing in the years 1153-65 for a Prior of Caldwell appears as the witness of a document of that date and hence its origin was probably in the reign of Stephen.

Originally Canons of the Holy Sepulchre, they were scarcely distinguishable from Black Austin Canons, save for a red badge on the cloak. The Canons possessed in this County four churches, Bromham, Roxton, Sandy and Oakley with the Chapel of Clapham, in the XIII. century, the Prior ranking as Rector. The temporal possessions in 1290 were valued at less than £50. At the siege of Bedford Castle in return for providing war materials to Henry III., they received a share of the stones from the dismantled Castle, which were probably used on the exterior walls of the Precinct on the Kempston Road.

In 1339 the King's Escheator seized the lands of the Priory, but the community received them back on an appeal to Edward III. It would seem that the Black Plague raged badly in Bedford in 1349. Evidence is available collected from the Bishop's Registers of Institutions to Benefices, of mortality among the clergy. These record only incumbents of the secular clergy, abbotts, abbesses and priors, they being subject to Episcopal jurisdiction. Also the Court Rolls dealing with the tenancies of land and recording deaths of tenants afford valuable evidence of mortality among the laity, though only giving the heads of families. Mortality among the clergy in the Black Plague was frightful. Within the year 1349 the masters of St. Leonard's Hospital and of the St. John's Hospital, the Priors of Newnham and of Caldwell and the Vicar of Biddenham all died. In the porch of St. Peter de Merton, Bedford, hangs a list of the Rectors of the Church. The list gives them—

1349 John de Gurmundecestre.

1349 Ric. Mareshall.

1349 John de Hydrynham.

A gruesome little record. Twice—if not thrice in 12 months the rectory is vacant, no doubt by plague.

I chanced recently to visit the ancient Church of Milton Ernest, Beds. The list of Rectors runs:—

1349. John Roger.

1350. Hugh de Middleton.

Wherever similar lists are preserved, they will probably tell the same tale of that dreadful year.

The history of Bedfordshire in this awful year remains to be written, as Canon Jessopp has written that of Norfolk in the "Coming of the Friars." Enough that two priors and two masters of Hospitals and two rectors of St. Peter's died. Where the chief ruler dropped the brethren of the house and the servants did not escape. It must have been a time of fear and dread, the pestilence walking at noonday, in that great barn-like building of Caldwell Priory, beside the Ouse, through the scorching summer months of 1349.

I refer later to William, Prior of Caldwell, elected in 1229; his successor Euxo resigned and fled before the visitation of the redoubtable Bishop Grosstete of Lincoln in 1249 being "accused by many."

The Priory appears to have been always in financial straits. Part of the tithes from the Chapel of Clapham and the Church of Morsworth in Buckingham became escheated to Osney Abbey, amounting to twelve marks, which the Canons of Caldwell tried to evade paying, and in 1279 they were ordered to pay "on pain of excommunication."

Hugh de Beauchamp, Prior in 1318, began a series of law suits on the subject, but evidently failed as the mortgage was still a liability in 1535. Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln granted a license to the Prior and convent of Caldwell to beg alms for repairs of their church on *account of poverty*.

The episcopal visitation (I have referred to that of Bishop Grosstete) must have been a not over welcome event. Bishop Buckingham visited in 1387, dwelt on the duties of obedience, silence, instruction in singing and grammar, and due administration of the goods of the Community and concluded by forbidding the canons to enter taverns in Bedford or to visit Elstow under pain of imprisonment and excommunication.

Bishop Repington repeated these injunctions and placed Bedford and Elstow absolutely out of bounds and "gated" one canon, John Wymington, absolutely to the cloisters, also forbidding the canons to drink except in presence of the Prior.

Bishop Grey on his visitation must have been astonished to find the illfated Canon acting as subprior and promptly deposed him. Whatever John Wymington's offence may have been, to be confined for life to that tiny cloister, a mere stable yard, must have been a frightful penalty. This good Bishop again put Bedford out of bounds and forbade the keeping of hunting dogs in the convent and ordered the Common Seal to be kept under lock and key, from which one may draw conclusions as to the discipline. However Bishop Longland accused the house of no worse fault than poverty.

I find further proof of the poverty of the Priory of Caldwell in the Calendar of the Eyre (Courts of Assize) for 1227-28. In English law of the period the beast or thing which caused a fatal accident was forfeit to the King, sold, and its value generally devoted to some charitable purpose "for the appeasing of God's wrath." The money was called a "*deodand*," viz., a gift to God, and was usually given to poor religious houses. Caldwell seems to have been specially favoured by the Judges, no doubt, on account of its poverty.

Thus, in a single page of the Calendar I find the Canons of Caldwell receiving three shillings and one penny found on a murdered man in the "vill of Hoh-ton"; twenty shillings, the price of a wain and oxen which killed a woman at Warden, belonging to the Abbot of Warden. This latter, "robbing Peter to pay Paul," must have caused ecclesiastical heart burning. No. 392 (Calendar of Eyre) runs thus: "Richard Fisher and Henry Miller were found drowned in Bedeford water, and they fell from a certain boat of the Prior of Caldwell. Price of boat two shillings. Let them be given to the House of Caldwell on the King's behalf." This is a roundabout method of remitting the forfeit while upholding the law of "*deodand*."

The last Prior, Thomas Dey, with six canons and two lay brothers, subscribed to the Royal Supremacy in 1535, and it was finally surrendered in 1536. Its existence thus covers nearly four hundred years.

Spede, including Caldwell among the various religious houses of Bedfordshire, says: "All these, with their like, felt the hand of Henry VIII. to lie so heaveie upon them that they were not able to sustaine the waight, but were crushed and fell to the ground." Caldwell fell less to the ground than most of them.

I feel a little satisfaction that the Gostwicke family, of whom I have not formed a very high opinion, were not left quite easy in mind as to that Indenture of 1546, and the turning of the Priory of Caldwell into a barn and home-stead. I cannot forget that cistern on the top of the truncated Priory tower. The year 1556 was a period not so favourable to them as 1546, and they no longer basked in the royal favour. Queen Mary sat on the throne; Archbishop Cranmer had paid the penalty of that Bill of Divorcement of her mother, which he had read in the Lady Chapel of Dunstable Priory, at the stake by the wall of Balliol College, Oxford, on the 21st March, 1556, more for his political action than for Protestant principles. Enquiries were being made as to the recipients of Church property, so hurriedly distributed by Henry VIII. Mary did not feel secure enough as yet to call for such Indentures, and put them in the fire; still things were moving. In the Land Revenue Records under "Church Goods," is a document which runs thus:—

"Leade and Bellys to be answeryd by dyvse psones under wrytten ageynst whom it is mete to make owt pcesse
 The Exec. and Admynyst The call uppon the Exec and Admynstrators of
 of Sr. John Gostwyke Sr. John Gostwicke for XIJff of lede of the late
 XIJff fryers of Bedd. by hym taken towards byldyng
 att Wyllyngeton, as Mr. Shepneth informeth."

This was the little cloud on the horizon of the Gostwicks of Willington in 1556. Doubtless Thomas Leigh paid an urgent call at Willington, and asked about that Indenture of 1546, and what about that "eighty pounds of lawful money?" The Gostwicks must have found it difficult to answer the question. However, it was answered by death, which solves so many Gordian knots, and Mary died, like her mother, a forsaken, broken-hearted woman, on the 17th November, 1558, and the "Great Eliza" reigned in her stead. The daughter of Ann Boleyn was not likely to trouble the Gostwicke executors about "XIJff of lede of the late fryers of Bedd;" and probably there the matter ended without anybody finding "it mete to make owt pcesse" against them.

I have given these details in support of what I have said that it was a poor, humble little Priory, probably never containing more than twenty canons and novices, always struggling against extreme poverty, and finally ending its

existence with six canons and two lay brothers. And yet, strangely enough, its main wooden conventual buildings, its cloisters and chapel tower remain almost intact to-day, close beside the Ouse, while stately abbeys have left little sign of their grandeur beyond a heap of stones. And we Bedford people have never noted this strange survival, and Lysons, with his "traces of conventual buildings may be seen in a field adjoining the farm-house," has misled us. I venture to think that throughout England there is no more interesting building than that ancient wooden barn as a type of early conventual life. Its age is probably at least 770 years, and yet we despise wood in our modern scheme of rehousing, even in the country where risk of fire is small.

CHAPTER XVI.

MY OLD HOME BY THE OUSE. CAULDWELL HOUSE.

"Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the play-place of our early days.
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still;
The bench on which we sat while deep employed,
Though mangled, hacked and hewed, not yet destroyed;
The little ones, unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw.

—COWPER.

THE second of the two country Ouse-side houses, Cauldwell House, some quarter of a mile from Cauldwell Priory, was occupied for many years by my grandfather, the late John Howard, as I have said in my preface, and was the home of my childhood. Its extensive and beautiful garden is raised above the river meadowland by a stone ha-ha. It is a curious house; three modern gables having been built on to a long, low, ancient cottage. When my grandfather went to live there some 70 years ago, it was called "Paradise," and is so marked on old maps, and the name continued to the early '60's. I still remember an ivory handled umbrella inscribed "John Howard, Paradise, Bedford." I think he was rather proud of the name, as you may guess from previous references to him. It lent itself, however, to unseemly jokes, and his family remonstrated. However assured he might feel personally of his ultimate spiritual destination, the assumption, or rather retention of such a postal address was previous, and suggestive of presumption in this mundane state. The family carried the day, and Cauldwell House it became.

Now, "the Paradise" was the monastic name for the garden; thus Shelley, writing of the Rome of his days, refers to the Vatican Gardens thus:

"The Paradise,

The grave, the city, and the wilderness."

The eastern wall of the Cauldwell House garden forms the actual western boundary of the Precincts or Paradise proper of the Priory. But the name attaching to this spot shows that the Paradise extended beyond the wall, while still further west the two fields comprising the property of "Austin Canons," owned by the Rev. P. W. Wyatt, are mentioned in the indenture of 1640 as "the Upper and Lower Paradise," and are so conveyed in the title deeds of the present owner.

By kind permission of Mr. Burridge, the present occupant, I land at the old familiar boathouse, where every stone and ancient tree is familiar as things only become familiar to a child. The stone ha-ha referred to is obviously monastic work. I explored the evidently very ancient cottage part of the house. The upper rooms once formed the nursery and night nursery of us four Farrar brothers, and later, after nursery days, it was our study. From it my three

elder brothers went out one by one into life, and I, the youngest, was left alone to pore over Thucydides and Latin prose, and sigh for them to come back to me. The rooms have long been abandoned to lumber, dust, and cobwebs. After all the lapse of years I stand again on the threshold of these now forlorn little rooms. I see again the wide window ledge—for the outer walls are thick—where I built farmyards with my bricks, and stocked them from Noah's Ark. The very door handle still gives out the peculiar sound familiar doors will do, a sound like none other in the world. There was the low ceilinged bedroom, so low that my brother George and I used to lie in bed and kick the ceiling, an easy feat. And there the same old grate where we cooked toffy, and the teapot for the "children's tea" kept warm. The old fragrance of lilac steals again to my senses through the open window, and spirits from out the past seem to gather around me and whisper, "We were here together then, but we are parted now." I see it all—a vision of our happy childhood all together—and a mist is over it, for, I am not ashamed to say, I see it through eyes dimmed and blurred. I turn and leave the room to sleep on in dust and lumber, beneath the sunlight of day and the moonbeam of night, and I tread softly, for the floor whereon I tread is "holy ground." Even Edmund Dantes, when he revisited the old prison cell in the Château d'If, could scarcely have been more deeply moved, and his was a prison, and this to me—the castle of my childhood. I am half-minded to delete this visit of mine there. It is scarcely for curious eyes to read of.

* * * * *

To my awakened senses it was a very ancient building of 16th Century, if not 15th Century construction, with scarcely a change, save for the glazing of the dormer windows, and the addition of fireplaces in the upper room; while the iron studded outer door, the kitchen fire settle, and other signs left no doubt. An adjoining barn was of like age, while a walled enclosure which we called the "Pigyard," was probably called so when the Black Canons kept "hogges" there for food and leather. For this was just one of those little "graunges" (granges) referred to in the Indenture, otherwise a little homestead of the Paradise. I judge it was the lodging of a lay brother, keeper of the adjoining fish preserves and pigyard. In the surveyor's plan of 1850, a pond I remember as a child is marked to the west of the house. This could not have been intended for cattle, as the field borders the river, and was undoubtedly a fish stew.

Why any architect embodied this ancient structure in a modern house of proportions I cannot imagine, but he did, and I am grateful to him. Just below the house an island meadow is formed by two straight, obviously artificial brooks. It is noticeable that this brook takes a bend of some 30 feet when about to re-enter the river at an obtuse angle. This I conceive was to facilitate the placing of a net diagonally upward across the stream, and so to turn the fish into the brook.

In my boyhood this brook teemed with fine fish, and in the season my grandfather always kept a bownet set at the entrance, and I have seen many a fine pike and bream and tench come up in it; and it supplied the household during the fishing season with fish. Tench, by the way, served with claret sauce—such was the recipe of those days—is, in my opinion, the most eatable of Ouse fish, except eels. Sometimes we splashed the brook with poles, and secured a net full.

Various artificial brooks of this kind are to be found all up the south

bank of the river to near Kempston. A notable one is that which divides the property of Austin Canons from Kempston Grange. It runs straight inland, and ends in a once fairly extensive pond. All these artificial streams were the fish preserves of the Black Canons of Cauldwell. Holdings on the river were rented by the Priors of Religious Houses, if they did not possess them, as well as by those who catered for the public supply. With regard to Religious Houses it was the custom to transfer the fish caught in the river alive to fish ponds, such as the "Fish Stews" at Newnham (King John's Ponds), or the ponds at Elstow, thus securing a plentiful supply of fish at all times. Fish were fish in those days, a staple food, and a source of revenue.

Domesday Survey, recording a list of 103 Manorial Mills in Bedfordshire, of which 35 stood on the Ouse from Turvey to Roxton, specifies the rents as paid in money and eels. Strangely enough the Domesday Survey dismisses Bedford in seven lines, occupied by some episcopal grievance, and makes no mention of any mills in Bedford, though there were at least three, of which later.

Just opposite Cauldwell House I remember how—when in my boyhood the river was drained very low to make the Bedford Embankment—from the centre of the stream emerged what I thought was a very small steep-sided island, covered with river weed, measuring 18 inches across, while a shallow ford across the bottom of the stream was visible. This, I am convinced, was the centre pier of an ancient bridge, probably of wood, belonging to the Priory of Cauldwell. Another similar but smaller eminence appeared in the centre of the stream exactly opposite the brook referred to as dividing Austin Canons from Kempston Grange, possibly the site of a mill. The Prior of Cauldwell owned in Bedfordshire the advowsons of Roxton, Sandy, Oakley, and Bromham, and the Chantry Chapels of Clapham and Bromham Bridge, the two latter probably served from the Priory, and property in Milton Ernest, as I have noted. In Bromham the Priory held land valued at 15/11 per annum, including a grange. This Bromham property passed at the dissolution to Eton College, in whose gift I believe the living still is, and in 1593 the property was purchased by Sir Lewis Dyve.

A bridge must have been essential, as there would be much coming and going from the Priory of Cauldwell to Bromham, Oakley, Clapham, and Milton Ernest, masses to be said, rents collected. A more expeditious route would be necessary than *via* Bedford Bridge, especially as the Monks of Cauldwell were strictly inhibited from going to Bedford. The places I have pointed out were, I am convinced, the site of two bridges, probably low, roughly constructed wooden bridges, such as I have met with frequently in the upper reaches of the Ouse, and like the one still extant at Newnham, which is certainly the original bridge of the Priory of Newnham.

Halfway down the river to Cauldwell Priory, on the south bank, are the almost vanished foundations of a roomy, stone boathouse, marked on the Surveyor's Plan, which existed in my boyhood, which we called "Pearse's Boathouse," for, belonging neither to Cauldwell House nor Cauldwell Priory, Mr. Theod. Pearse, the Town Clerk, annexed it. It was swept away by a high flood many years ago, but its solid construction, of the type of building just referred to above, assures me it was a monastic boathouse; and the foundations, though now nearly buried in earth and silt, are still visible. This was, no doubt, the boathouse of the Canons.

* * * * *

This part of the river was very familiar to me when a boy, as most days

of the year I canoed from Cauldwell House to school. Hence I give a brief sketch of the river to Bedford Bridge as it looked to me 50 years ago.

The north bank of this portion of the stream was then called "The Common," from opposite Cauldwell House to the Hitchin Line Bridge, a wide stretch of meadow, common to the Freemen of Bedford, though no longer in possession of the Corporation. It was the duty of the Head Constable to prepare and light a bonfire there on the 5th of November. Below the Hitchin Line Railway Bridge—first keeping to the south bank—there were two large osier beds, where now is the children's play ground, with a bathing house called, why I do not know, "Shakespeare's." This was the winning post of the Regattas, for the modern custom of rowing the races down stream, and thus giving the sightseer on the Embankment a view of the finish, is quite recent, and of course far more sensible, though reasons for such a change did not exist fifty years ago.

To me as a child there were far more fascinations in a regatta than the fate of battling crews. There were to be seen folks walking a greasy pole over the water, for a pig or a goose at the end of it, resulting in many a plunge amid uproarious laughter of the crowd, especially when the almost-victor attempted to handle the pig and both went down. There were duck hunts and humorous people who capsized for the amusement of their neighbours, and there was no rule of the river, and consequent collisions. C. E. B. Gillions and "one-legged Serjeant" were the presiding deities of the day—a truly regal carnival.

Noteworthy is the King's Ditch, which flows from the point below the play ground, circulates the southern portion of the town anciently called Mikesgate, returning into the river below the Great Weir. This is such an ancient and historically interesting water-course that I have given to it Appendix VIII. As a stream compared with the Ouse it is of course an infant, constructed one thousand (1,000) years ago, A.D. 920 by Edward the Elder, to protect the southern part of the town against invasion by the Danes. But of all that man planned and wrought those thousand years ago "they bought, they sold, they builded, they planted" no stone is left upon the site of this ancient town, save it be the containing walls of this ancient water-course, and daughter of the Ouse. A visitor from those ancient days would recognise the Ouse and the King's Ditch and nought else in Bedford even the churches, save perhaps a portion of St. Peter's Tower. The map of 1836 shows that the then intake of the King's Ditch was behind the osier bed, now part of the mainland, and hence the first fifty yards of the Ditch is modern.

Following its course up to the boundary of the gardens, its original beginning, I remember a stream leaving it at right angles, dividing the meadows from the gardens of Mrs. Hurst and Mr. Franklin; that it dived under an arch and flowed concealed beneath Hobson's and Nash's premises and issued at the southern arch of Bedford Bridge. The grim archway where the stream vanished was to us children a place of fear; some Kraken or water serpent might have its lair in that Stygian tideway and we never ventured a canoe therein.

"No gallant Knight, adventurous in his bark
Will seek the fruitful perils of the place,
To rouse with dripping oar the watery dark
That bears that serpent image on its face."

All traces of such a stream have disappeared, save the archway in a hole of stagnant water. From this stream there was originally a cutting returning at right angles to the river. The opening was in my childhood represented by

the blind end of the wharf between Hobson's and Nash's. Mr. Thody remembers that the barges went up this stream, turned to the left, passed Hobson's house and re-entered the river at Bedford Bridge. I mention this network of streams, forming various islands on the south bank, because they are all obviously artificial works of ancient date, and were, without doubt, the fish preserves of the town, as we have seen were the various cuttings westward for the Priory of Cauldwell. An utilitarian age has filled in all these streams, except the King's Ditch, and the whole southern bank is now mainland.

John Leyland, the antiquarian, who visited Bedford in the reign of Henry VIII. says there were "many little holmes" or islands between Bedford and Newnham. There were no less than seventeen such islands, traceable on the map of 1836, between the Hitchin Line Bridge and Newnham, and now there are eight.

This portion of the south bank was more picturesque than to-day, with a charming little garden, hiding Hobson's timber yard, long vanished; but a few years will no doubt see this bank, now purchased by the Corporation, as it should be, laid out for the public with a riverine road and gardens. The Bridge Public Garden was then the private garden of the Nashes who resided at what is now the Bridge Hotel. "Nash's Corner" at a regatta, alike for oarsman with his second wind returning, and for coxswain, was the critical part of the races, as I know from many a trial. Rumour had it that a former Nash found a swampy osier island at this point, possessed of no title deeds, and that he annexed it and made it into the charming garden it was and still is. As the Roman Nobles thrust out their villas into the sea at Baïæ so the Nash of those days thrust out the island at the corner by putting stakes and boards down and then filling them in with ashes. This was the origin of the oarsman's "mauvais moment," Nash's Corner. The river banks in those days appear to have been a sort of "no-man's land." You squatted there and you stuck there, and if any one asked for your title deeds, as the Earl de Warene exhibited his sword as his best title deed, so you brandished stick or oar, and defied enquirers to come on and disposses you—to tread but upon the tail of your osier bed; I trace again the atavistic strain of distant Ousites. Would I could do the same to-day.

The northern bank of this section of the river has changed little. Where the public baths now are was a side stream, behind three osier islands two of which have been removed, where boats were kept by Chetham. Chetham's boat yard, at this point, was then the only one of its kind, though a predecessor boat-builder, one Layton, built and let boats at "Little Chetham's" below the Bridge. Boats were not then of the universal varnished appearance, but painted in gorgeous colours and variegated in ornaments. Beyond this point come the horse wash and "Batts' Ford." I think that in the Middle ages the river was much wider and so shallower. The recent cutting at Cauldwell Priory which I have mentioned shows the river clay bed gradually shallowing to a bank 100 yards south of the present bank, evidencing a prehistoric period when the river was an estuary of some 220 yards across. Clearly "Batts'" was a ford and not a ferry. Who Batts was I know not; my grandfather told me the place had always been "Batts' Ford," in his day and before. As the reputed burial place of King Offa it needs comment, and deserves an Appendix.

Beyond, the north bank to Bedford Bridge shows little change from the map of 1836; except that the Girls' Modern School and the Shire Hall replace an old brewery and sundry narrow private gardens. There stood a coal wharf at Barnard's Bank as Mr. George Langley recalls, but long outside my memory.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEDFORD BRIDGE.

"God's blessing on the architects who build
The bridges o'er swift rivers and abysses,
Before impassable to human feet,
No less than on the builders of cathedrals,
Whose massive walls are bridges thrown across
The dark and terrible abyss of Death.
Well has the name of Pontifex been given
Unto the Church's head, as the chief builder
And architect of the invisible bridge
That leads from earth to heaven."

—LONGFELLOW'S *Prince Henry* in "*The Golden Legend*."

THE frontispiece of the book shows the old Bedford Bridge, built in 1224 from the stones of the demolished Castle of Bedford, in its original design, save for a Chantry Chapel dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle which stood at the southern end.

The making of roads and bridges was in mediæval times an obligation upon the pious and faithful, part of the "*trinodia necessitas*" and ranking with the other duties of visiting the sick and charity to the poor, and for its due performance indulgences were granted. A religious order, with the object of building bridges, was founded in the XIIth Century, that of the Pontife Brothers or bridge makers, the celebrated bridge of Avignon being their work. Probably the material and spiritual aspect of a bridge is given in Longfellow's lines at the head of this chapter originates the word Pontiff. "Truth," in "*Piers Plowman*," bids wealthy merchants among other things to "*amenden mesondieue* (hospitals)" to repair "*wikked wayes*" and also

"Brydges to broke by the heye weyes
Amende in some manere wise."

Probably all main stone bridges had a Chantry Chapel of which the Priest collected the "*Brudtholl*" or "*pontagium*," viz., bridge tolls, and was bound to make the necessary repairs which were often evaded if possible. Such a Chantry Chapel still survives on the bridge of St. Ives.

Jusserand (English Wayfaring Life in the XIV. Century) quoting from the Rolls of Parliament, Vol. XI., page 88, A.D. 1338 cites the case of the Bedford Bridge Chantry Chapel, "John de Bodenho, chaplain, explains to Parliament that the inhabitants of Bedford hold their own town at farm fee from the King and have undertaken to maintain their own bridge. For this they assigned certain tenements and rents in the said town to support it and with their alms have newly built an oratory on the side of the said Bridge. "The burgesses gave to the plaintiff the charge of the reparations together with the whole revenues. But the Priest John of Derby represented to the King that it was a royal Chapel which he might dispose of, and the King has given it to him, which is very unjust since the Chapel is not the King's; even those who founded it are still living." All these reasons were found good; the judges

were enjoined to do justice to the plaintiff and were reprimanded for not having done it sooner as had already been prescribed to them. I doubt not that in 1338 John de Bodenho, flushed with triumph over his law suit, held solemn thanksgiving in the Chantry of St. Thomas the Apostle by the Bridge of Bedford and afterwards caroused at "Ye Signe of Ye Falcon" in Vine Street. Hence the Chantry was built some time before 1338, the founder being still alive.† I surmise this chapel was built as a substitute for the Chapel of the Shrine of King Offa, situated, as I believe, at Batts' Ford and swept away by a high flood as told by Matthew Paris, a contemporary of Henry III., Chief Scribe in the Scriptorium of St. Albans Abbey, author of the *Chronica Majora* and *Historia Anglorum*, to whose pen we owe the account of the Siege of Bedford Castle.

Various derivations have been given of the name Bedford.* The name appears in Norman times as "Bedanford" later "Bedeford." It is spelt Bedeford in the records of the 3rd and the 5th year of Edward III., but appears in its abridged form Bedford in the 18th year of Edward III. I incline to the derivation from the Saxon "Bede" (prayer), hence the name "Bedesman Lane," close adjacent to the bridge, and that the name means Chapel or Prayer Ford. A ford (Saxon "faran" to pass) was applied to the passage of a river either by wading, ferry or bridge.

This Chapel was probably demolished at the Reformation. The centre of the two guard houses, as seen in the frontispiece, appears to have been used as a lock up, and a legend assigns it as the prison of John Bunyan, though this was no doubt the town gaol at the corner of Silver Street. Both these bridge structures were demolished in 1765. A shallow patch of river bed on the east side shows where the lock up stood. Spede mentions "The faire stone bridge . . . whereon are two gates to locke and impeache the passage as occasion shall serve." Hankin in his "Accounts of Bedford," 1828, says that "workmen engaged on the foundations of the present bridge found Roman coins and rose nobles of Edward III., beside antiquities still preserved by the inhabitants. Some pieces of oak were also found in a good state of preservation, capable of taking a fine polish, from which small boxes, etc., were made as curios." Otherwise the bridge remained intact since 1224 and stemmed the winter floods for 589 years until replaced by the present bridge in 1813. There must have been good work put into the bridge of 1224, probably by Pontife Brothers who were skilled in the art of bridge building, for it was soon put to the test. There is a notice in the *Annales Monastici* (de Dunstaplia) that a vast flood occurred on November 20th, 1254, which swept away a great part of Bedford and drowned many of both sexes, young and old, even children in their cradles. The old bridge of 1224 must have witnessed many a desperate fray as contending forces disputed the passage of the river and strove to close the guard gates as their opponents struggled to burst through.

Mr. James Wyatt ("Bedford after the Saxon Period") cites among many entries in the Corporation books as to the closing of the gates the following:—"Item yt ys ordered, that the great cheyne by every night at ten of the clocke to be locked crosse the great bridge and so kept untill fyve of the clocke in the morninge and that he or they that shall dwelle in the bridge house to keepe the Keye of the said locke and keep the same soe locked and not to suffer anie horse,

† Bedfordshire Historical Records, Vol. I., page 10 states that "in either 1179 or 1189 (Shrievalties of William Rufus) Simon de Beauchamp gave to the Hospital of St. John his chapel at the bridge of Bedford. This points to a bridge Chantry prior to John de Bodenho's chapel in 1338.

* See Mathiason's "History of Bedford," published 1831.

horseman or cattell to passe within that tyme wch he shall not knowe. And of them wch he shall knowe to take a pennee only for letting downe the cheyne and noe more."

An inscription on the present bridge runs as follows:—

"The original bridge over the river Ouse at this place, was of remote antiquity; its date is not known, but there was certainly a bridge of stone before the one built in the early part of the 13th century; of its existence and dimensions many indisputable traces have been found. Upon the demolition of the Castle of Bedford, in the year 1224, a larger bridge was founded of the materials; which having fallen into decay, was, after a lapse of nearly six hundred years, taken down and replaced by the present structure,

Designed and executed by John Wing, of Bedford, under the direction of Commissioners, authorised by two Acts of Parliament, of the 43rd and 50th of G. III. The first stone was laid by Francis, Marquis of Tavistock, on the solid rock, below the piles on which the foundations of the ancient bridge were placed on the 26th day of April, 1811.

Grant David Yeats, M.D., Mayor of Bedford. It was completed, and opened for public use on the 1st day of November, 1813, in the Mayoralty of William Long, Esq., in the 54th year of the reign of King George III."

I scarcely think the composer of this inscription had any reliable data to go upon in asserting the existence of a stone bridge prior to the one of 1224. The "indisputable traces" of such a bridge may well have been stone foundations in the bed of the river of a wooden trestle bridge, similar to the Magdalen and St. Germain bridges over the Ouse near Lynn, which was more consonant with the age, and is suggested by the oak timbers referred to by Hankin.

Mr. A. R. Goddard, in "The Great Siege of Bedford Castle," quotes the Pipe Roll of 34, Henry II. (1187-8), which makes the first mention of a bridge of Bedford, the Sheriff having spent £4 6s. od. "in the works of the bridge of Bedeford and of the postern towards the water." Mr. Goddard inclines to think that this refers not to the main bridge, but to the stone barrage to which I refer in the next chapter, as crossing the river obliquely from the Castle to the Island of Elba. I think Mr. Goddard is wrong in supposing that this structure was ever a causeway or a bridge; I hold it to have been purely a river barrage, such as we have seen at Thornton Hall, constructed for military purposes. The remains of this barrage were demolished in 1774, and its material used in the construction of Howard Chapel. To this barrage no doubt was due the disastrous floods which damaged the town so often in mediæval times, such as the one referred to in 1254.

I am of opinion that the earlier approach to the town, viz., in Saxon times, was not here at the bridge, but further down, viz., a ford at Little Chet-ham's. My reasons for thinking so are as follows: St. Cuthbert's Church, founded by King Offa in atonement for various misdeeds, especially the treacherous murder of the King of the East Angles in 772, is no doubt the most ancient church in Bedford. The main street of the parish, leading from Goldington Road *viâ* St. Cuthbert's and Newnham Road, running direct to the river, and commanded closely at the river by the Castle Mound, is probably the oldest main street in Bedford, previous to the erection of St. Paul's. Supposing a ford at this point, it would be directly guarded on the south side by the southern Town Gate or Porta of Mikesgate (Potter Street). I conjecture that in Saxon times the river was fordable here and at Batts' Ford, no bridge existing on the present site, and that it was only on the construction of Bedford Castle in

Norman times, that the present site became the main crossing of the river, probably by a wooden bridge, preceding the bridge of 1224.

At the opening of the present bridge in 1813 it was subject to toll, and a toll-gate stood at the northern end, tolls on horses and carriages being levied, for the purpose of defraying the cost of £15,000. The Duke of Bedford and the Samuel Whitbread of those days contributed handsomely towards removing the liability of Bedfordians to toll, and, as a second inscription on the bridge tells, it was declared open and free of toll on July 1st, 1835.

As I have said elsewhere, prior to railway days, such bridges as Bedford gave passageway to many famous passengers, and in an imaginary dialogue between the Ouse and St. Mary's Church Tower (Appendix I.), and a scene of the passing of Katharine of Aragon, I have sought to give some glimpses of the past. With reference to the passing of Katharine of Aragon I have no historical voucher for it. If, as is popularly supposed, she was *en route* for Kimbolton, she would, of course, have passed over Bedford Bridge from Ampt-hill. Buckden, however, was her immediate destination; and in that case it is almost certain she would pass Bedford by the main high road from Ampthill. The by-roads to Barford or St. Neots bridges would have made very bad travelling over low-lying country. Furthermore, she would not have chosen to pass by Willington, the home of the Gostwickses, Sir John being Master of the House to Henry VIII., a staunch Protestant, and of the Boleyn party. As a good Catholic she would naturally prefer to pass through Bedford, with its four Religious Houses, its Nunnery of Elstow, and its five Churches. There she would be sure at least of the allegiance and blessing of Holy Church, and I do not doubt that Bedford Bridge witnessed such a scene as I have described in chapter XXI.

The present bridge, with its 107 years, shows good construction, having needed little if any repair. The enormous increase in traffic, alike in volume and weight, makes one doubtful of such immunity in the near future. Just before the war plans were discussed for widening the bridge, which is too narrow to allow free way for its traffic.

THE OUSE OF 50 YEARS AGO, FROM BEDFORD BRIDGE TO NEWNHAM.

“ Mine eyes
I never shut amid the sunny ray
But straight with all their tints thy waters rise;
Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willow grey,
And bedded sand that veined with various dyes
Gleamed through thy bright transparency. On my way
Visions of childhood ! Oft have ye beguiled
Lone manhood’s cares, yet waking fondest sighs
Ah, that once more I were a careless child ! ”

—COLERIDGE.

THEY who have read the previous chapter, and would read this must be Old Bedfordians indeed. By others I shall be deemed to tell of uninteresting trifles, but I write them down, lest they pass with us “ Ancient Mariners ” into oblivion.

A study of the map of Bedford of 1836 shows much less change on the south bank below Bedford Bridge to Newnham in the flux of time. Here John Leyland’s “ many little holmes ” remain almost intact. Somewhere to the rear of the present cinema stood an ancient riverside inn, “ The Boy and Oar ” (a corruption of the “ Buoy and Oar.”) I think it must have been demolished between 70 and 80 years ago, for when I question the “ Ancient Mariners ” of it, the name is quite familiar; they recall that the near end of Duck Mill Lane was called “ Boy and Oar Lane,” but no one can actually visualise it. It was one of the three riverside “ publics,” much frequented by the bargemen. The smallest of the three islands was, and is still by a few, called “ Elba,” for there Napoleon I. was burnt in effigy, amid great rejoicings at the time of his banishment to Elba. (See Appendix X.). These islands were in my boyhood, I believe, in private possession, or at least occupation; one occupied by an open-air skating rink, when the fashion first arose in the ’70’s. They are now fortunately owned by the Corporation, and give access to a beautiful riverside walk to Newnham, open to the public.

At the period of Bedford Castle (Henry III.) a stone causeway crossed the river, diagonally to the current from the Castle to Elba, traces of which can be plainly seen when the water is low. This was, I judge, a barrage raising the river level above it; the object of this barrage was, I conceive, a military one. By this means a swift current would be forced through the two water defences of the town, viz., the King’s Ditch and the Castle Moat. The former, already spoken of, and described in Appendix VIII., is seen upon the map of 1836, having its intake a quarter of a mile above the bridge, and its outlet a hundred yards or so below the great weir, into the lower river. The stone barrage would give it sufficient fall to induce a rapid current through it, while even now it has a fair fall. The Castle Moat had its intake close to the bridge, flowed along the east side of the High Street, turned down Rose Inn yard and Castle Hill,

where traces of it have been found, and where portions of the Castle wall are still to be seen, passed the site of Howard House in Mill Street, and then turned sharply back to the river along Newnham Road. The map shows a ditch at this latter spot, no doubt the remains of the Moat; while an inlet at Little Chetham's, where, as the "Ancient Mariners" recall, Layton kept his boats, was the embouchure of the Castle Moat. The barrage would produce an even swifter current in the shorter course of the moat than in the longer course of the King's Ditch. The name Mill Street suggests a mill attached to the castle and upon the moat; hence it is convenient here to discuss this mill, along with the Duck Mill, which occupied the site of the great weir on the south side of the river until forty years ago.

It is most unfortunate that, just as Pepys has left his Bedford visit mere loose jottings in his diary, so Domesday Survey almost ignores Bedford in seven lines of episcopal complaint. One finds a full record of all the Bedfordshire mills from Turvey to St. Neots, with their rents and tallies of eels, while Bedford mills are omitted, Duck Mill and Newnham surviving until recent times. But the name Mill Street persisting adjacent to the course of the Castle Moat gives one to think.

Mr. Glassby, in his interesting lecture on "Bedford Town and People in 1507," quotes a parchment of 1672, referring to "a house, garden and barn in Mill Lane, otherwise School Lane," which barn served John Bunyan for his meeting house, on the site of the present meeting house. The house was known as the "Garden House." Mr. Glassby possesses a document recording that in 1507 there was a school and a schoolmaster's house on the north side of the lane, about the site of the *Beds. Times* Office, under the control of Newnham Priory. He quotes references to this school as existing in 1150 and 1305. This school probably shared the fate of the Priory in 1541, while the Harpur Schools were founded eleven years later in 1552. Mr. Glassby conjectures that prior to this date, Mill Lane was the name of the present day Duck Mill Lane, on the south side of the river, and that on the disappearance of the school, the name Mill Street was given instead of School Lane, owing to the existence of a horse mill at this site, while Mill Lane became Duck Mill Lane.

Now of this horse mill—Mr. Glassby quotes an enquiry held on the 13th May, 1608, "at ye signe of the Swanne," concerning "the mault mill in Bedford called Trinitye Mill." Witnesses were called as to the repairs of the horse mill. My theory is that the Constables of Bedford Castle, in the early Plantagenet period, would not waste the water power of the moat, but would have a water mill for the service of the castle, on its safe northern side, and that when the moat was filled up water-power was exchanged for horse-power. This seems confirmed by Chart R. 11, Edward II., m. 16. The same document refers to the old wooden structure of Duckmill, on the south side of the river, removed forty years ago, as "Joel Mill," in the 17th century, later as James' Mill (after the King), and subsequently as Duck Mill. I think this would have been the Domesday Record of the Bedford Mills, viz., "Trinitye Mill within the Castle, Joel Mill, and Newnham Mill."

Returning to the south bank, no change has taken place within memory of man, save the removal of the Duck Mill for the great weir, and the public pathway laid out. Just below the weir several charming gardens touch the south bank of the lower river, among them that of a house standing in Cardington Road (Potter Street), St. Mary's Abbey, certainly, save for my old nursery cottage at Cauldwell House, the most ancient private house in the town,

and probably the town house of one of the Bedford Priors. The outlet of the King's Ditch follows immediately. On this southern bank, at Fenlake, I may record that Heenan, the great pugilist, did his training in preparation for the great prize fight with Tom Sayers.

Returning to the upper river, the stretch down to the overshot and boat-slip, by the island below the Rainbow Bridge, is, of course, the "spillway" of the mill; from that point to Newnham, the upper river is obviously an artificial cutting, constructed, no doubt, by the Priors of Newnham to relieve the floods, and protect the Priory.

I now revert to the northern bank from Bedford Bridge to Newnham. My earliest recollection is of an archway on the south front of the Swan, through which one reached the charming riverside garden of the Swan, descending in trim lawns and flower beds to the water's edge, and extending down to Little Chetham's cottage. Close to the Swan there was a horse-wash which led down from the stable yard, on the north side of the inn, under the garden, a paling in the river preventing the horses getting into deep water. The present wall between the Swan billiard room and the store room, east of the Swan, now blocks the way. The Duke of Bedford gave the Corporation a strip of 12ft. of this garden next the river, and the present Embankment was constructed in 1871, on this 12ft. with the necessary encroachment on the river. My illustrations show the ancient "Swanne," dating from mediæval times, opposite which John Bunyan preached, and the Swan as it was in my youth. Spede, speaking of this bank, and of Bedford Castle, remarks: "Some ruinous walles appearing towards the Ouse, but not a stone left up on the Mount where stood his foundations." These were the remains of the southern walls of Bedford Castle abutting on the river, still surviving in the reign of James I.

I have referred to the inlet which marked the end of the Old Moat course at the end of Newnham Road. It should be noted that in the map of 1836 Newnham Road is called Thames Street. The name Thames occurring here, as at Tempsford, will be discussed when my canoe reaches Tempsford. The stone wall which bounds the Castle Close garden along Newnham Road is no doubt part of the castle outer walls, and the containing brick walls appear to be on the same ancient foundations. The northern wall again appears in Castle Hill. Beyond this point, where handsome houses now stand, the district called postally the Embankment—fronting one of the most beautiful river promenades in England—there existed in my boyhood a very dilapidated group of cottages, called "Waterloo." Its only approach was by a cart road round "Peck's Close," a field given up to circuses, fetes, etc. One William Peck was, according to Mr. Glassby, one of the largest Bedford landowners in the 15th century. An indenture in his possession hires lands in Bedford, Goldington, and Clapham, and tenements in St. Cuthbert's, by William Peck, to John, Prior of Newnham. At Waterloo were two noted "bargee" publichouses—"The Jolly Waterman," at Layton's boatyard, and the "Three Cups," further east. By kind permission of Mr. Thody, I reproduce a picture of the scene, though the artist greatly flattered this once desolate spot, with its muddy banks, and osier swamps, as shown in the map of 1836, its ancient dilapidated boats, and general appearance of down-at-heelness. Anything less suggestive of the present brave aspect of this site by the Ouse cannot be imagined.

And now I come to a very peculiar feature of this bank of the river. Referring to the map of 1836, one may note that the southern bank of the upper river is in the parish of Goldington. The parish boundary, as marked, crosses

the river diagonally to Little Chetham's corner, on the northern bank, and then continues down the northern bank to Newnham, enclosing some 5ft. of the bank. This is at once a very eccentric and most inconvenient demarcation of a parish boundary, or rather a borough and county boundary. As you stroll down the promenade you alternately dither backwards and forwards from the parish of St. Cuthbert's, Bedford, to the parish of Goldington, in the shire. What is the result? Should any individual be so unfortunate as to drown himself, or so misguided as to commit suicide in this reach of the river, the recovered corpse must be conveyed straightway to the distant village of Goldington, and be there deposited in such poor accommodation as a village publichouse can offer. Sorrowing friends are hurt in their feelings, village juries protest to the county coroner, and county and borough police gird at each other. The situation would be grotesque if it were not so pathetic. The borough surveyor at the Town Hall can show the borough map, with this outrage upon the decencies of respectable, law-abiding parish boundaries, the boundary showing over normal flood level. If Bedford still retained the quaint practice of "beating the boundaries," an extra flogellation to this perverse boundary would be merited.

I offer a solution of the problem, which has found favour in the eyes of the borough surveyor and the "Ancient Mariners," who colloque with me on the "Annales Bedfordienses." Mr. Glassby states that the Prior of Newnham had a "holding" (a fish preserve) allotted to him from "near the entrance to the Duck Mill," including the ditch which had been the moat of the Castle. He further quotes a record of 1506, relating to a robbery of fish, running thus, "Henry, Prior to the Priory of St. Paul's Newnham offered himself against Thomas Lucas of Bedford Carpenter, and John Jackson of Bedford Cordyner, for breaking into the Close of the said Prior and fishing in his private fishery, and taking and carrying away fish thence to the value of 100 shillings."

I doubt not that various "carpenters" and "cordyners" of the Bedford of 1506 found zest and profit in dropping night lines into the "holding" of the Prior between Duck Mill and Newnham. I picture Prior Henry putting on the agenda of next morning's "Conclave of the Chapter": Item 1. "To dyspute on ye Fyshes Holdinge over against ye Mille of Joel," and Prior Henry then bespeaks the Chapter thus: "Of what use to us this holding whereof the south bank is in our parish of Goldington, and the north bank is in the baillewick of Bedford. Vagrants and masterless men of Bedford do ensnare the fyshes of the holding from their Bedford bank. I will summon the Mayor and Bailiffs before me in Chapter, and to them will I show that I will mark out a 'swan walk' all down the north bank, which shall be a message of the Priory of St. Paul of Newnham, and this message will I enclose with a wall and close its end with a safe postern-gate Bedfordwards. *Placet-ne vobis, Fratres? Placet.*"

Mayors and bailiffs were small fry in the eyes of the Lord Prior, who besides being prelatically domineering, had views, like later generations we wot of, as to the banks of the Ouse that "let him hold who can"—and he did.

No doubt Alderman Paradine protested in the Moot House to his Worshippe against ecclesiastical aggressions, and quoted the Statute of Præmunire and such like, but the vote was *nem. con.*; and next morning the Town Clerk took quill and inkhorn and clerkly wise described a "mappe" of the "Ouse streame," whereon a strip of message 5ft. wide was duly indentured to "Henry Lord Prior of Newnham"; and to this he appended a waxen seal—sigillum Bedfordiense—and then next day he presented it on bended knee to the Lord

Priory Henry in the Chapter House, and was dismissed with a "*Pax tecum, mi fili.*" I hope the Town Clerk appreciated the pious benison, but if I know anything of town clerks, when he issued from the gate-house of the priory of Newnham his language would be such as would shock even the willow trees on the Ouse banks. And so were the vagrants and masterless men of Bedford baulked of their 100 shillings of "fysshes," while sorrowing mourners, indignant juries, and irascible policemen of later days have protested against this anomalous boundary; but the fish wardens of Newnham Priory slept more peacefully on their plank beds. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.*

* * * * *

The little low timbered bridge which crosses the river at Newnham is no doubt the Priory Bridge. Possibly, like the "wonderful one horse shay," it has seen so many repairs that little of its original timber is left; but like the two bridges which I have spoken of, as connecting the Priory of Cauldwell with the northern bank, this bridge is characteristic of the structures of that period built purposely low to stop intruders by boat.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT AT CAULDWELL PRIORY IN 1230.

"Slowly, slowly up the wall
Steals the sunshine, steals the shade;
Evening damps begin to fall
Evening shadows are displayed.
Round me, o'er me, everywhere,
All the sky is grand with clouds,
And athwart the evening air
Wheels the swallows home in crowds.
Shafts of sunshine from the west
Paint the dusky windows red;
Darker shadows, deeper rest,
Underneath and overhead.
Darker, darker, and more wan,
In my breast the shadows fall;
Upward steals the life of man,
As the sunshine from the wall.
From the wall into the sky,
From the roof along the spire;
Ah, the souls that die
Are but sunbeams lifted higher."

—LONGFELLOW, *The Abbot Pacing the Cloisters*, "Golden Legend."

HANS Andersen has a charming story, "The Goloshes of Fortune." One Counsellor Knapp, of Copenhagen, at an evening party, had praised the Middle Ages as a much more interesting period than his own, and held the days of the Danish King Hans as the noblest and happiest. A fairy had a pair of magic goloshes, which possessed the property of transporting anyone who donned them at once to the time and place of which he was thinking most. Every wish in reference to time, place, and circumstance was at once fulfilled. When the worthy counsellor came to go home he donned the "Goloshes of Fortune," by mistake. He stepped out into the muddy, rutty street of Copenhagen three centuries previous, no street lights, stinking open drains at the side of muddy streets, boisterous passers-by and would-be footpads tracking his steps. He found things not quite as interesting as he anticipated they must be; while the ways and manners and morals of the citizens left some doubt upon his mind as to whether it was the happiest and noblest age of all into which he had accidentally stepped. Similarly I am seized with the desire to borrow the "Goloshes of Fortune," and back paddle my canoe into the year of our Redemption, 1230, six years after the fall of Bedford Castle, to see how men and things wagged upon the banks of the Ouse at Bedford. "Hey presto! fairy, those goloshes of thine."

* * * * *

So to resume my voyage, from which I digressed in Chapter XIV.

The Colonel has gone on for his 7.30 dinner at Bedford, and C.B. and I have loitered behind to discuss the literary problem of how to deal with this familiar stretch of river, as I have narrated above. Thus, burnt by the sun,

with muddy clothes and weary arms, yet proud of our maiden voyage, we paddle clear of the osier beds at Cox's Pit. We come upon a little wooden bridge, like the one at Newnham, which I feel ought to astonish me, but does not, and stooping to pass under it, I am looking eagerly for the chimneys of my dear old home, Cauldwell House. I rub my eyes, for it is not there; only a tiny cottage, the familiar ha-ha below and the long stone wall running from the river to the Kempston Road.

We come upon a young monk, in a black robe with leathern belt girt up, and showing a pair of bare, hairy legs, lowering a bownet into the mouth of a long straight brook upon our right bank—a great, raw-boned, moon-faced youth with a merry grin. He gives us a somewhat jocund “Pax vobiscum,” and we respond with a meek “Et tecum.”

He has a deal to ask as to who we were and what we were doing. We had come past Sharnbroc? His father and mother lived at the mill. Had we had speech with them? Who was he? He was brother Ambrose, novice of the Priory of Holy Cross by Caldwell just yonder, and that was the Fish and Pig Grange, the cottage just there. Yes, the fishing was good. And he held up a bunch of great tench threaded on an osier, just taken from the bownet. He was sent on fish duty, because he knew all about fishes, for there were many fishes at Sharnbroc. He had “exeat” until Compline bell. The fish had need be good, for they got little else but bean soup and fishes to eat in the Fraternity. Had we anything to give him to eat, for he was hungry? I produced an unfinished packet of sandwiches, and a hunk of cold plum pudding, when crossing himself and muttering a “gratias Deo,” he fell voraciously on these, looking curiously and appreciatively at the plum pudding, which he devoured in vast mouthfuls. I had no mixtum (beer) in the shallop? That was a pity. The cellarer served them only thin measure of mixtum, and as for wine, the Lord Prior had ordered in Chapter last month that no wine be purchased for one year, that the money might go to repairing the Chapel Tower and the roof of the Dortor, which did let in rain water. Was I going to Bedford? He would like to go to Bedford. The Lord Bishop at the last Visitation had forbidden the Canons and Novices to go to Bedford, even to cross the bridge, and had stopped the giving of exeats to Elstow, where there was good mead and hippocras, and—good mains of cocks were fought. Would I of my goodness convey a cartel to one Robert Perkyns, a learned clerk in minor orders, albeit tapster at the Falcon nigh St. Paul's Church? Unsuspectingly, I consent, little recking of the twinges of conscience it was to cause me later. He sat down, drew a style and a piece of parchment from his pouch and laboriously wrote, then pulled a thread from his robe, and tied it up. “By the blessed Saints I would deliver it?” I thought no ill, and took the cartel. He glanced at me as if in doubt, and then “I was his good friend. Grammercy, of my kindness would I call at the sign of St. Christopher in Pudding Lane, leading down from Vine Street to the river, and ask for the serving wench, Audrey Pynkes—she could not read—and tell her to meet him at the end of Pudding Lane with a pair of hose, a jerkin and a cap, at 9 of the clock to-morrow evening. She was a right merry wench.” I coughed, signed in the direction of C.B., and murmured a “*maxima debetur pueris reverentia*,” to which he replied with a grin and a “*Cucullus non facit monachum*.” I felt doubt as to that cartel in my pocket, but to Pudding Lane I would not go. Besides, in face of the Bishop's prohibition “under pain of imprisonment or excommunication” how would he go to Bedford? Oh, that could be managed. The sub-sacristan was on the roll to sleep in the

Chapel on the rood screen, for the Chapel was never left day or night. He was his good friend was Brother John le Gros. Brother John would go to the infirmary sick and would ask that the novice Ambrose take his turn to sleep on the rood screen. It was Hok Tide to-morrow in Bedford and he had promised John le Gros to wager him six pennies at the cock fight in Coltes Lane where the De Beauchamp cock would fight against the cock of the Mayor. After supper he would go to the rood screen and climb out of the window of the chapel into the yew trees and swim to Pudding Lane. The Prior was lame with rheumatics and would not climb the stair of the rood screen at the last round, and would think him asleep if he did not answer. As to the Night Offices at midnight, the Cantor was short sighted and only counted and John le Gros had promised to be there. If he were missed—well it would be the discipline of the flagellum and bread and water and he was well used to that. There was only one risk—in swimming. Old Peter Batts at the ford might mistake him for an otter—there were many about—a plague to the fish—and shoot a quarrel at him, but he was usually drunk, and sure to be so at Hok-Tide. Once he had hit the novice Peterkin in the leg when swimming to Pudding Lane. I need not fear; all was arranged, he would see Hok Tide in Bedford next night and be back by the Missa Familiaris at 6 in the morning. The "Rule" of discipline, he went on, in the Priory was hard. There was the "Great Silence" and the getting up at midnight to Prime and the bean soup and the monthly bleedings, and it was perishing cold in the Cloister in winter. Beside the Novice master was always hard and cruel to him, and Dom William, the Cantor, was always accusing him in Chapter though he always gave him the solo parts to sing in the Gradual. He would run back to Sharnebroc if he dared, but they would only drive him back. Once in the Priory it was for life and he liked Bedford. He would like to be a soldier or a pardoner or cordyner. He was not sure he would ever get beyond two steps of the clerkship, like Robert Perkyns, but to the priesthood never; his calling and election—well, it was not sure, though he could sing the Gradual better than any of them, even the Cantor said that. About that cartel I would be sure and deliver it, and if I saw any of the Canons I would say nothing of it or show it. With an uncomfortable feeling as to my Herodian promise I bade him goodbye and he crossed himself, folded his hands under his scapular and gave us a grave "Pax vobiscum."

As we passed beneath a second low wooden bridge opposite the Fish and Pig "Grange" a monk, evidently in haste, with a roll of parchment with depending wax seal hurried over. He could not stay to talk. He was the Cellarer and was bound for Bromham. Dom Antony, the Almoner, was sick and like to die; he had already been conveyed from the Dortor and laid on the cross of ashes on the floor of the Infirmary. The Prior was about to give the Viaticum. The Dom had sent a message asking his brother to come from Bromham. He had also to collect the overdue rent from a farmer, tithes from the vicar, and take the Prior's complaint to the Miller that the last rent of eels was 5 short. We were going to Bedford? It was Hok Tide and the Bridge would close early to stop vagrants and the men of Mikesgate coming in and the "George" and the "Falcon" would have all beds full. It were better to sleep at the Priory and go in the morning. When we reached the north wall of the cloisters, we should see two windows; we were to hold up both hands as a signal and a canon would inform the Hosteller who would come. And then he hitched his robe up through his belt and started in a long louping trot along the path toward Biddenham.

We passed the long stone wall of the Paradise. Beyond it a swan walk along the river was bordered by a high yew hedge, showing the yellow mark of winter flood water, with here and there arches cut through it, through which we caught sight of the Paradise beyond with dark figures still at garden work and a light breeze brought the sweet scent of the bean crop.

And here was the Priory, a vast, long, wooden walled structure with tiled roof and two smoking chimneys at the back, standing at right angles to the river, then a short high wall with two shutter windows giving on the river—a small squat tower and a little Chapel whose roof just showed above dense yew trees. We saw the shaven tonsures of monks at the windows, sitting back to us. Presently one turned and we made the prescribed sign, on which he bowed and disappeared. There were two grass terraces to the river and a gardener was collecting bowls and putting them away in an iron chest on the upper path. Presently from the east end of the Chapel came a tall handsome monk with a thin anxious nervous face. He bowed; he was, he said, the Hosteller or Guest-master, and bade us land, signing to the gardener to take our bags and tie up the canoe. We would have lodging for the night? He bade us welcome in the name of the Lord Prior William of Caldwell. As we followed him he reminded us it was the "Great Silence"—it would last until after the "*Missa Familiaris*" at six next morning, and must be observed by all within the cloisters, but after Compline and supper he would be privileged to talk to us as guests, for the Hosteller was then excused all duties of silence, and attendance at some of the Night Offices, to wait on guests. We skirted the east end of the Chapel and came to the entrance door in the southern wall of the Cloisters, the door of which was unlocked by the porter and we stood in the northern Cloister—a poor mean lean-to Cloister which went irregularly round the four sides of a cobbled garth with a well in the middle. I could see some twenty monks seated in the cloisters across the garth. Dead silence reigned—not a head was raised to note us. We passed down the eastern cloister where four novices were studying the Psalter, while one had swept a space bare of the rushes which strewed the floor, and was drawing Euclidian figures on the pavement with a burnt stick while the novicemaster with a scourge in hand pointed silent directions. We came to the northern cloister and at the corner, close to the doorway leading through the little tower to the Chapel, sat the Lord Prior, in a "carrel" or half partitioned seat. He was a swarthy Italian-looking man with a strong, deeply lined face and clear dark eyes. He wore a cowl on his head and a fur tippet with a gold pectoral cross on his breast. He returned a stately bow, as the Hosteller silently introduced us, held out his hand and at a sign from the Hosteller we stooped and kissed the jewelled ring. No word was spoken. Behind on the wall above his chair a shelf of volumes hung and curiously enough a squirrel in a cage. Down the northern cloister beyond the Prior were some 15 black robed canons seated on stools intent on their breviaries, save one who was seated at a table with pigments and brushes before him illuminating a missal. Each had his shelf of books behind on the wall and some pet in a cage, here a rabbit, there a jackdaw and even a young badger.

The floor was strewn with rushes, and bundles of straw lay between each stool, against cold to the feet. A low wall divided the Cloisters from the Garth, otherwise it was open in front to the air. It was here that they lived summer and winter (for there were no cells), save for the hours of Chapel, Refectory, Dormitory and field work. I pictured the comfortless scene on a bitter winter day or a snowy night, lit by the four guttering cressets on the four

corners of the Cloister roof, each canon huddled in his cowl, his feet in the straw, sheltering a flickering candle which *would* blow out, behind his huge volume of St. Ambrose or Gradual or Psalter. It made me shudder to picture it.

The Prior signed to the novice and presently a bell in the tower began to ring. It was the hour of "Compline"—7 o'clock. The Hosteller led us into the Chapel. It was a little plain building with small windows which admitted scarcely any light for the high yews surrounding it. It was almost night inside. A heavy rood screen left two-thirds of the building as the Presbytery. On the altar twinkled a little light before the Host, and a server was lighting 2 candles. As I entered I stumbled over the outstretched legs of a man lolling back in a stone chair by the wall. In the dim light I saw a rough, huge-limbed man, evidently half roused from slumber by my foot, whose shaggy hair was clotted with blood which had run down and dried upon his face and streaked his beard. He seemed spent and exhausted. Our guide took no notice of him but signed to us to climb the steep, narrow stairs of the rood screen where we sat looking down into the choir. At the end of the narrow bridge was a straw pallet. This then was the starting place of Novice Ambrose's proposed escapade. It seemed a venturesome climb to the window above. That cartel was guiltily reclining in my pocket and—my promise. There were no other lights, for the Hosteller whispered that all knew the Office by rote.

The bell stopped. The canons in cowed cloaks filed into their seats on either side of the chancel beneath us. I could see the tonsured head of the Prior below me in the returned seat below the screen, the Subprior on the left. In low muttered tones came the "Confiteor." The Cantor gave out the Psalm. Some fifteen male voices, trained in the perpetual "*opus Dei*," mingled in perfect unison and rhythm in the Plain Song as from side to side surged the antiphonal verses. I began to catch the words.

"*Fiat pax in virtute et abundantia in turribus tuis
Propter fratres meos et proximos meos.*"

and back came the full deep toned response—,

"*Loquebar pacem de te*" and again "*Propter domum Domini Dei nostri quesivi bona tibi*" and then in full volume as they rose to their feet with bowed heads came the "*Gloria Patri.*"

I noted an old white haired canon below beginning to nod gently with sleep as the waves of melody began to lull him.*

One clear beautiful tenor, like the "*vox humana*" of an organ, ran through the whole melody. I peered over to trace through the dim light the singer and there he was—the Novice Ambrose, of the townet and the cartel, with face devout and raptured by the music. Yes, he had not boasted in vain that the Cantor chose him for the solo of the Gradual.

Below, the man in the stone chair had fallen into deep slumber and occasionally snored.

Then followed "Our Lady's Anthem," the infinitely pathetic wail of Eve's banished children weeping to Mary "kindly, loving sweet Virgin Mary" whose obedience and intercession restored the lost to Eden. The Pater, Ave and Creed over, the canons filed out, and as we followed close behind the Prior, the Priest who had said the prayers sprinkled us with holy water from the Holy Water Stoup as we passed.†

The Hosteller whispered us instructions; we must observe the "Great

† I used as a little child to swim my tin boats and fish in it, for it stood in my grandfather's garden at Cauldwell House.

Silence " at supper; if we needed food we should describe a circle in the air with the finger; if drink were needed make a gesticulation of drinking—so—and the servitor would come. We passed down the Cloisters into the Refectory or Fraternity. It was a great bare white-washed building, with huge, rough, oaken beams above blackened by smoke and open to the tiles. At the north end alone a tapestry, representing the fall of Lucifer, in crude colours hung behind the high table and the Prior's chair, and here and there on the white plaster rude images of Saints had been painted. Above the tapestry hung a huge roughly carved crucifix, with the emaciated figure of the Crucified painted a dull livid colour—"the Majestas." A fire burnt in the deep settle and the same old drowsy canon whom I had noted in the Chapel, bowed, shaking and toothless, crouched over the fire on the settle with a wooden soup bowl in his hand. It struck chilly and dark even on a summer evening, for there were no windows, and guttering candles stood upon the high table and the two tables down the centre and the cross tables, while smoke from the fire blew inwards. The Subprior stood to the left of the Prior's chair; the canons were standing with hands folded beneath their scapulars at the centre table, the novices at a lower and half a dozen servants and two evident beggars at a cross table before the buttery hatchment at the south end. They were waiting in silence for the Prior. An occasional clatter of a dish from the kitchen alone broke the silence. Presently an acolyte in surplice came in and whispered to the Subprior, who turned and rang the "scylla" or bell above the Prior's chair, gave the "gratias Deo" and signed to the lector who stood ready to read on a platform against the wall. The Hosteller seated himself beside us at the lower end of the Canons' table, while the Lector in a high monotonous voice began to read a chapter in Latin. Once the Subprior irritably interrupted him and bade him read slower and pronounce the Latin better, otherwise "mixtum" would be banned for a week.

Two canons with white sleeves acted as servitors. Bean soup, cabbage and bread on wooden plates were served to all, but to us well cooked tench. There was no spoon, knife or fork—one drank from the bowl and then used the fingers. There was no need of signs for the servitor filled our wooden plates and pewter cups plentifully. I noticed Ambrose at the novice's table always circling in the air and when at last he drained his cup of mixtum for the third time and made the drinking sign the servitor angrily shook his head.

And then suddenly I heard the tinkle of a bell away overhead somewhere behind. The meal suddenly ceased; the brethren rose and crossed themselves and stood motionless with bowed heads. The Hosteller whispered that the Prior was administering the last Sacraments to Dom Anthony. The Chapel belfry began the measured strokes of the passing bell. Some fifty slow strokes and it was silent. The Subprior in deep resounding tones began—"Oremus pro anima Domini Antonii nostri fratris." Supplication and response went on and here and there I catch the words.

V. Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei . . .
Christe eleison—Kyrie eleison.

R. Erue, Domine, animam ejus.

V. Requiescat in pace.

R. Amen.

V. Domine—exaudi orationem meam.

D. Et clamor meus ad te veniat.

V. Dominus vobiscum.

R. Et cum spiritu tuo.

A last prayer, and in dead silence we followed the procession of monks to the Cloisters, saw them climb the steep, narrow ladder to the Dortor, for it was sleep until the Night Offices began at midnight, or rather to-night, the Requiem at 11 o'clock. To-morrow a shallow grave would be dug at the east end of the Chapel. One more life spent year after year in the narrow confine of that little Cloister had finished the never changing round of monastic life, wherein Dom Anthony had striven to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The Hosteller showed us the washing-place in a corner of the north cloister; he would return and show us our sleeping place when the "Great Silence" would be pretermitted for us. Presently he returned with a pleased look. The Lord Prior had been pleased to send a cartel, giving permission for us to walk with him—Dom James Boteler—on the swan walk for one hour until half after nine of the water clock, and he himself was excused the Night Offices, save the Solemn Requiem for Dom Anthony at eleven. We stepped out into the Paradise as into a new, bright world, leaving the gloom and the silence behind us. The sun had just set brilliantly. A nightingale was trilling his carol, and away up the Paradise neighbours were answering; the river slept still in the gloaming, save now and then for the splash of a fish or the booming note of a bittern and the call of a corn-crake in the meadows across the river. And as we strolled by the Ouse Father James Boteler, the Hosteller, began to talk. It was *such* a relief, he said, after "the Great Silence." It oppressed them sometimes; it was the day after day, year after year; there was no relaxation, even when sick, and it brought on "accidie," the weariness of the spirit, and many snares of the devil, but it was necessary, yes—necessary to the "opus Dei."

The first year of noviciate was hard, he said. To learn to wear the habit, to carry the hands, to walk with gravity, to bow seemly. Then the custody of the eyes and what a monk must know by rote, and how to sing, and grammar and Euclid. Yes, the Rule was strict, very strict. But then the last Prior had been remiss and evils had crept in, and the Prior had been deposed, and Prior William was severe. It had been necessary to draw the rein. Of course the Priory was very poor, not like Newnham or Dunstable, but was it not better and easier so to mortify the flesh in the humble "*casæ*" of Caldwell than in the wide stone cloisters of Dunstable. He thought that so there was more merit. Why had he professed? His face twitched, and his hands clenched and reclinched. There were his father and mother and sisters at Cardington, and there was—he would scarcely see them again—but was there not "the Call" and "quid enim proficit homo?"

We reached the wall of the Paradise, and leaning over, he pointed out the hog yard and many pigs, which he said brought them good profit from leather. As we paced the bank he talked much of the daily round. The guest house, he told us, was close to the road of Kempston, a humble place, suited only to the poor and vagrants, such as the two we had seen at supper, thieves they were, he thought. The place was full of vermin. Guests of quality, though few came to Caldwell, were lodged by the fire in the Refectory for warmth. He feared we should be disturbed in sleep, as the brethren rose for the Night Offices, and to-night would be the Requiem beside, but they all wore night shoes of felt, and made little noise. Still, there would be the bell and the chanting. The Missa Familiaris would be at 6, when all, even servants, must attend, saving guests. Then breakfast, standing in the buttry, followed by the Chapter, the Hours, the daily round, the fixed work of the afternoon in the field, which he liked. The last three months he had been

building on the wall on the road of Kempston. The king had given the Prior "a grant of stones" from the Bedford Castle, which was being razed. It was necessary to wall the Priory against thieves, who were many on the road. The king, in the Statute of Winchester,* had ordered that the edge of the highways should be cleared for a space of two hundred feet either side, that there be no coppice, brushwood, or hedge wherein malefactors could hide and rush suddenly on honest travellers. The building was hard work and wore the hands, but then one saw passers-by, though silence was obligatory. Once he had seen his father pass.

Of course, as Hosteller, he had many privileges, and guests brought him news of the outer world which he had left. Dom James asked us of our boat and whence we came. No guest of quality, as he was good enough to call us, despite our Ouse-worn garments, had ever come by the river. Had we met many lawless men by the way? No boats came into the fish holdings, save a poacher of fish at times. He had never been in a boat. There was the Lord Prior's boat in yonder boathouse, but only the Lord Prior and the Subprior went in it at times, rowed by the Fish and Swan Wardens, when they went to inspect the fish holdings or to nick the swans on "hopping day."

Oh, I had talked with the Novice Ambrose? Yes, he sang beautifully, but he was oft in the toils of the devil. Once he had gotten to Bedford and was put in the stocks for brawling. He had brought a bull pup from Elstow and had kept it hidden in the corn bin, and hunted vermin with it. The Prior had ordered it to be drowned and Ambrose flogged. At to-morrow's Chapter he must accuse Ambrose—yes, it must be—of not keeping the guard of the eye at Terce, and unseemly signs at supper. No defence was allowed. The Lord Prior would order 10 strokes of the discipline. It was no use to expel him. The pride of life and the lust of evil must be chastened out of him, but the Prior was over partial to Ambrose for his singing voice, and he also played well at bowls and chess, and the Prior had known Ambrose's father and mother before. The cartel seemed to burn in my pocket, for I was to deliver it on the morrow, and I feared it had to do with the swim to Pudding Lane.

Suddenly, I recollected the man in the stone chair, and sought information. Dom James told me that that was the "freedstool," or chair of peace. The man was a fugitive criminal, and had claimed the right of sanctuary. He and Dom John, the Sacristan, were appointed to hear confession, and make report thereof to the Lord Prior, and a special Chapter would be held after *Missa Familiaris*, and then the Lord Prior would give judgment on the man. Meanwhile, save for the time of Confession, he must remain in the chair unfed until to-morrow. Better so for him, for if he fell into the hands of the King's Justices he would hang on the next gallows.

* * * * *

When we returned to the Refectory a novice dragged in two straw pallets for us, which he laid on the settles either side the fire. The Sacristan entered, accompanied by two lay brothers, as witnesses, and seated himself in a chair below the great crucifix, while Dom James Boteler placed inkhorn and a great parchment bound volume on the high table and sat ready to write. The fugitive was brought in, knelt before Dom John, and for awhile nothing was heard but the muttered questions and answers of the Confessional. He was sworn upon the Gospels, and conducted back to the chair in the Chapel by the Sacristan.

* The Statute of Winchester (Edward I.) was passed in 1285. I claim historic license of 55 years.

The two monks then consulted at the table, and Dom James wrote in the book by the light of a candle. The flickering fire, the dim, smoky chamber, the scratching quill, the gaunt crucifix, the blackness overhead, all gave me an eerie feeling. Sprinkling the page with sand, Dom James beckoned me, and invited me to read what he had written. It ran thus, translated from the Latin ·

“ To be remembered that on the 28th day of May in the year of Redemption 1230, William Strynger of the Parish of Wilhamsted fled to the Chapel of Holy Cross within the Precinct of Caldwell, where on account among other things of a felony committed and publicly confessed by him, of breaking into a certain dwelling house in the aforesaid Parish, and grievously wounding Peter Ailand; he asked from the venerable and religious men John Haughton, Sacristan of the above Chapel and James Boteler, Hosteller, and Master of the Galilee,* both brethren and monks of the same Chapel, to be admitted to the immunity of the Chapel according to the liberties and privileges conceded in old time unto the Founder, and by the ringing of one bell according to custom he obtained the same. There were present, here seeing, the discreet men Thomas Hudson and John Wrangham, witnesses called in especially for the occasion.”

* * * * *

C.B. slept the sleep of the weary on the straw pallet, but I was restless with this strange, silent, cloistered life all round me. At eleven the bell began. I heard the shuffle of feet overhead, and the creak of the ladder, and peering through the door I saw the ghostly cowed procession steal noiselessly down the Cloisters, where the four cressets were flickering low. I lay awake listening, as now the bell tolled and now the voices joined in the Requiem, until at last the feet shuffled again overhead, and silence settled down, and I slept.

* * * * *

At six Dom James Boteler woke us, waited while we did a hurried toilet, and led us to the buttery adjoining the Refectory, the kitchen just beyond. All the brethren were there standing, making a hurried meal of mixtum, black bread and cold beans, while we were served with cold fish without plates. Dom James advised us to start early for Bedford to get a room at the George, before the crowd came into Bedford for the Hok Tide. Besides, there was the burial of Dom Anthony, and he would be too deeply engaged to show us the due courtesies of the House. He gave directions to the Novice Ambrose to take our bags to the river side, and led us through the Cloisters to the Prior's chair by the Chapel tower. Our guide checked us, for the Lord Prior was engaged for the moment.

Before the Prior's chair knelt the felon William Strynger, guarded by two lay brothers, one of whom bore a knotted scourge. The Prior was just concluding his sentence, “ And that you the said William Strynger for Penance be here contained for six days on bread and water, and that each morning you be flogged with 20 strokes of the discipline before the door of the Chapel, and that you having purged your felony shall go hence unto the port of Lynn Episcopi,† to go out of the realm, so that in going to the said port you carry a cross in your hand and that you go not out of the King's highway, neither to the right hand nor to the left hand until you shall have gone out of the land whither you shall not return without special grace of our Lord the King, and that if any do molest you in such going the same shall be excommunicate of Holy Church. Amen.” The group were waived aside.

* The grant of Sanctuary was marked by ringing a bell, called the Galilee bell.

† The old name of King's Lynn.

The Prior spoke some gracious words, and hoped we had rested in peace in Holy Cross. He bowed courteously; we kissed the ring and received the "Pax vobiscum," and his blessing, and once more were in the outer world, though there lingered the strange oppression and sense of having been immured in a living tomb.

We bade Dom James farewell with grateful thanks for his kindness. He stood looking wistfully down the river to Bedford, sighed, crossed himself, and turned aside. Ambrose meanwhile standing behind, grinned, touched his pocket, and jerked a thumb towards Bedford. Gladly would I have flung that wretched cartel in the water, but I had promised.

* * * * *

As we paddled away there came the sudden howl as of an animal in torture, and yet again it broke out. The penance of William Strynger had begun.

* * * * *

I could not banish remembrance of that wistful look on Dom James Boteler's face as he had spoken of father and mother and sisters and someone else at Cardington, so near and yet so remote. Some strange exaltation of spirit, some ministering angel, surely must come at seasons, as to St. Peter in his prison cell, or else how possible that narrow, cribbed, confined life within the Cloisters of Holy Cross by Caldwell?

CHAPTER XX.

HOK TIDE BY THE OUSE IN 1230.

"This countie among the Common calamities of the Land when it lay trampled under the feet of the Danes, sustained a great part. And after that in the time of King Stephen, when the Civill Warres thundered betwixt Maud, the Empresse and himselfe, the Shire Towne was sore wasted with greate slaughter of men. So when the Barons foresook their allegiance to King John the Towne and Castell were rendered up into their hands; and lastly by King Henry the third laid level, even with the ground, some ruinous walles appearing towards the Ouse, but not a stone left upon the Mount where stood his foundations."

—JOHN SPEDE, 1552-1629.

A THICK morning fog hung over the river, and as we cleared the yew hedge of the Swan Walk, and passed along an osier bed on the right we almost collided with a boat anchored in the stream. A great filthy paw came out and gripped our gunwhale, the other hand holding a fishing rod, and a huge, raw-boned, red-faced beggar held us in check. He, like Ambrose, was a talker, and would know who were we, and what were we doing in that "shallop"? Supped with the Prior of Caldwell had we? A hard man on poor folk like himself, who must catch fish.

A sudden interruption. His float had gone under. Still keeping a hand on our gunwhale, with the other hand he dragged up a great wallowing bream of 5 lbs. He glanced furtively up stream, unhooked the fish, flung it in the bottom of the boat, put a foot on the head, and as the great tail flapped against the boards he crushed his heel upon it and resumed his talk. Where were we going to land, because the gate on Bedford Bridge would be late in opening on Hok Day? They wanted no Mikesgate men or vagrants over the river. Oh! at Batts' Ford, were we? Well, he could tell us old Peter Batts, the porter of the Ford, would have no beggars landing in shallops into Coltes Lane at Hok Tide. The burgesses and commons would be noisy enough of themselves without villains and hindes coming in. He, Peter de Saulsby, was one of the tuttimen, and was going to dine with the Mayor and Bailiffs and Chamberlain at the Moot House at 11 o'clock. The tuttimen would go round after the feast to every house, kiss the women, and take a penny toll of the men, for such was their privilege at Hok Time. "Ho, ho!" he laughed aloud. "Old Guillaume le Botcher will look ugly when I kiss his young dame Audrey, and will curse by all the Saints when he has to pay up that penny." No, he thought we had better not go nigh old Peter Batts at the Ford; he was ill of temper and when drunk, which was often, handy with the quarter staff and did not stand for broken heads, and sometimes even took crossbow and quarrel. There had been a scurvy riot last summer. Old Peter had shot a quarrel bolt into the leg of a Caldwell Novice swimming in the river at night, saying he thought it was an otter. The Novice said he was swimming for a "penance of cold." The Lord Prior was very angry, and—so the Sacristan had told him—had called the Novice "Satanas" in the Chapter House, flogged him with many strokes, and given him bread and water for one month, and had put Peter into the stocks, but the Mayor and Bailiffs took him out. We had better get past old Peter Batts on the

Mikesgate side of the river. The best way for us was to go and give his name, Peter de Saulsby, to the priest of the Chantry of the Blessed Saint Thomas on the Bridge, and Peter crossed himself, for John de Bodenho, the priest, was his good friend, and there was a little "privie staire" down from the Chantry to the river. Meanwhile, if we gave him, Peter, 10 groats, he would hurry on to the "Signe of the George," in the High Street, and order us beds, for beds would be scarce in Bedford at Hok Tide, and doubtless we would pay also 2 groats for a jack of mead for him. I handed him half-a-crown. He looked curiously at it, spat on it and bit it, and put it in his pouch. Suddenly behind us came the sound of a boat through the fog. "By our lakin," said Peter, "the fish keepers are coming." Hastily he pulled up his stone anchor, took to the oars and pulled hard into the fog down stream, shouting to us to be careful not to go nigh the King's Ditch, which was just ahead, as there was a strong current drawing into it, and it ran like a mill race. As we came near into Batts' Ford, peering through the fog, we were aware of a brawl on, and a fat, fierce-looking old man, Peter Batts, no doubt, was wielding a quarter staff against three men up to their waists in water trying to land at the Ford. I heard a sounding crack upon the head, and one is down in the water, while the other two go wading back waist high, swinging their arms as men do when trying to hurry through water, while old Peter Batts yelled profane oaths after them.

Over mean wooden houses on the left, with squalid yards opening to the river, I saw, above the fog, the tower of St. Paul's Church, with a great breach in one side as though it had been hit by mangonelles, and here we are at the bridge. It somehow looked strangely new in its construction to me, and yet familiar, with its two guard gates and Chantry Chapel on the Mikesgate side. The fog still hung thick, and I was not sure where the "privie staire" to the chapel might be, but I seemed to remember that there was a little winding stair under the northern arch, and for that I steered. Through the archway I could see the long line of the battlemented castle walls, and three great half-ruined towers rising above the river, and I was so occupied in gazing round at the Castle Walls that I did not notice the canoe was moving swiftly on a powerful sucking tide. All at once, as we came out from under the arch the canoe bow veered rapidly round, and I saw in an instant we were being drawn into a rushing stream—the Castle Moat. I caught sight of its two slimy weed-covered walls with the castle battlements high above us on the right, and then echoing up against the walls above us came the thud—thud—thud of a mill wheel. I shouted to C.B. to back hard, and as the canoe crashed against the wall, seeing just above my head an iron ring, I rose and clutched it, and there we hung in the torrent. We had only just escaped being drawn down to some mill-wheel beyond, which would have ended our story and our voyage.

I shouted to some men who were looking over the bridge, and presently they flung a rope, and so from the bridge above they dragged us out of that fearsome stream, and towed us across to where, on the south bank, was a little patch of marshy ground, below a buttress of the bridge and the little "privie staire" to the Chapel above.

John de Bodenho, who appeared at the stair head, proved a surly, greedy fellow. He would have none of Peter de Saulsby's friendship and recommendation. "Peter was a thief, a liar, a lecher, and a rogue." He had some long-winded grievance against one John of Derby, the Priest, who

apparently had tried to cheat him of the "brudtholls," but he had proved to the King that his Chantry was not a Royal Chapel. This shallop had come under the bridge, which was the same as over, and that was four groats. If it stayed on his messuage all night that was four groats, and for watching it four groats, for villains might throw stones at it from the bridge. Then he had closed the gate against all Mikesgate men except the "quality," which he saw we were not. He would pass us over at double pontage, eight groats. My proffered half-crown was accepted suspiciously with an intimation that there might be more pontage to pay to-morrow, for it was Hok Tide, we must understand.

We passed through the little Chantry, and through the two guard gates for which John de Bodenho had given us a tally, and so into the High Street. I must deliver that wretched cartel, so I turned down Vine Street, by St. Paul's Church, to the "Signe of the Falcon," and found Robert Perkyns, who despite he was a learned clerk in minor orders looked a drunken, dissipated rogue. He said Brother Ambrose was his good Coz, and if I were returning to Cauldwell Priory I could say he would be ready. This I did not propose to do.

Returning to the High Street, we saw that the front wall of the Castle had been razed, and great heaps of stones stood piled up, but the interior buildings to the great half-ruined Keep on the mound and the river walls were still standing. The street was like a cart road, full of ruts and deep holes, and ankle deep in dust. Mean little wooden houses, straw thatched, lined either side, the shop portion in cellars below the road with stairways projecting into the road and impeding traffic. On the rails of the stairs and forms outside, goods of all kinds were displayed, while 'prentice boys bawled the wares and clamoured to passers-by to buy what they lacked. Each house had its sign of a swan or a falcon, a hart or a red lion, and such like. Here and there appeared a better house, with an upper projecting story or "solar room," balconied in front, acting as shelter to the cellar shop and stairs. A projecting pole and bunch of brushwood showed the inns where drink was sold. Down the western side ran a deep, stinking ditch, the Kennel, crossed here and there by planks.

We made our way through the pestering 'prentice boys, and a crowd which seemed pouring in from all sides, and reached the "Signe of the George," with its great archway, and wide inner court. A lean, dirty, shrewish woman, who appeared to answer to the name of Jacqueline, was hostess. No Peter de Saulsby had ordered beds. We were fools to have given him money. Peter a tuttiman indeed! The Mayor ought to be ashamed of himself naming him, but no doubt Peter gave him poached fishes. Let Peter try to kiss *her*. She was keeping a firkin of pigwash handy. We wanted to break our fast? She was too busy with the feast toward at the Moot House at 11. We could go across to the buttery yonder and get bread and cheese and honey mead, for which three pennies beforehand. Beds to-night? By the blessed Saint Thomas, why not ask for the Charter of the Baillewick? Why even people of quality would be glad to sleep in the inn yard. As for those "fardels," our bags, unless we sat on them they would be stolen—yes i' fegs, and the owners of them get knifed by likes to boot."

In the buttery a score of people scrambled for bread and cheese and quarrelled over earthen pots of mead, and we got but little. There was no getting attended to for a meal, for tapsters and serving boys were hurrying

out to the Moot House with steaming joints, capons, flagons and bottles of wine, for the Mayor and Bailiffs were about to feast with the "tuttimen." Presently, as we strolled through the crowd, we heard uproarious revel in the Moot House, loud cries and thumping of tables and rattling of pots, and soon the Mayor in robes came to the open upstairs window, looking red-faced, bibulous and hiccupy, and scattered handfuls of small coins to the crowd, then hunks of meat and legs of capons, and finally hurled a gigantic meat pasty on their heads. The row became deafening, as the crowd fought like dogs over coins and meat, and the pasty apparently lay buried beneath a struggling heap of men, women and children. Out at last sallied the "tuttimen," bearing staves with huge bunches of flowers, taking the stairs very unsteadily, one arriving head first down the steps, to start on their round of collecting kisses and pennies. Among them I espied that ruffian, Peter de Saulsby, extremely drunk. Shrieks, laughter and oaths proceeded from the houses in their wake until, as they visited house after house, a furious commotion started opposite a house just beyond Mill Street. We were swept thither helplessly by the surging crowd. Craning over, I descry Peter de Saulsby, quarter staff in hand, making furious play with a little, bald-headed, red-whiskered, bandy-legged old man, who, despite his years, wielded a hefty staff. The latter had evidently so far had the worst of it, for Peter, a foot taller, had caught him on the side of the head, and blood was streaming down his jerkin. Above, at a dormer window, a youthful, buxom, blue-eyed dame with auburn ringlets, looked smilingly down upon the contest. I guessed what had happened. That was Mistress Audrey le Bocher yonder at the window, and the little bandy-legged fighter was Master Guillaume le Bocher, who was thus disputing the tuttiman's privilege of kissing Mistress Audrey, and mulcting him of a penny. Mistress Audrey looked quite indifferent whether the blood of her spouse or of Peter flowed. The end came soon. The little man was snarling like an angry dog, and leaping from side to side with surprising activity, while the crowd yelled with delight. Peter made a mighty blow to finish the fight, the little man slipped under it, and before Peter could recover his guard, swung his staff, and caught his opponent a crack on the head which would have felled an ox, and laid Peter prone and senseless in the dust. Mistress Audrey vanished from the window, while the crowd surged off for other diversions. The little man wiped the blood from his face with his hand, stalked into his door and slammed it, and presently piercing shrieks and the sound of blows within left no doubt that Mistress Audrey was paying dear for accepting too complacently the salute of the drunken "tuttiman." But nobody heeded.

Another row started near St. Peter's. I could see men and women at an upper window raining missiles down on the crowd, who replied with showers of street cobbles. Shrieks and crashes of breaking earthenware resounded over the shouts of the crowd. But here comes his Worship the Mayor armed with a formidable mace, with Bailiffs in front bearing coloured tip-staffs surmounted with the Borough arms, which were evidently no mere signs of office. They hit right and left into the crowd, shin or head it mattered not, cleared a passage and made for the row up street, while his "Worshippe," deep in his cups, staggering in his walk, and hiccupping strange and furious oaths, rolled in their wake. Someone among the bystanders apparently made a remark offensive to his dignity, for he whirled up his mace and sent his objector down with a stunning blow on the head. Henceforward his Worship

showered blows on back, head and shoulders of any who came in his way, and presently we could see mace and tipstaff rise and fall among shrieks and oaths, as the crowd fled from the scene of bombardment. Peace was apparently restored, for the moment, for the authority of Mayor and Bailiffs was evidently not to be lightly disputed. The fallen Peter had now sat up in the road, with blood streaming over his face, from a gashed scalp. I rejoiced over the fall of Peter, and asked him why he had played me the scurvy trick of taking my money, and not doing my errand to the George. With drunken effrontery he said I was a scurvy rogue myself, had passed him a base coin, and he would have me before the Mayor and into the s-s-stocks, he meant to the g-g-gallows. I left the rogue in disgust, and by-and-bye I saw him crawl to the edge of the Kennel, lower himself into the filthy water and garbage, and begin to lave his broken head in this noisome stream.

And now something was agog and about to happen, we knew not what, for folks were rushing into shops and indoors, and goods were whisked from the cellar rails until the street was empty. We stood in the street, near the George, and noted men, women and children, armed with sticks, clubs, pitchforks, and various weapons, peering round the half-closed doors, and craning their heads up the street, while women crowded the upper windows. All at once the great folding doors of the George Gateway slammed to behind us and I heard the bar inside dropped into place. Someone shouted at us, but I could not catch what was said. Suddenly I heard the dull roar of a crowd coming nearer, and to my amazement round the corner of Silver Street came at full gallop a bull, tossing his head furiously, evidently maddened with fright. I heard a shout from C.B. He rushed on to the platform of the pillory close at hand, and with the agility of youth caught one outstretched arm and circled it. With a desperate effort I got my chin above the other, and finally breathless we sat astride the pillory arms, only just in time as the bull charged down on us, while a yelling crowd surged close at the heels of the maddened and now bleeding brute. Two men and a boy dashed out of a doorway opposite and beat it furiously with clubs on the flank and sides, and then fled back to shelter as the bull wheeled and charged furiously in pursuit, its horns crashing against the closing doorway, and gouging great splinters out of it. Then the furious beast wheeled, and head down, charged the following crowd. Men and women went down, but clubs and pitchforks headed him back. The boy who had just escaped into the doorway ventured out, and stealing behind the battling bull, drove a pitchfork into its flank. It all passed in a flash. The bull whirled round, and I saw the horn rip the arm from wrist to elbow and blood gush, and the boy was tossed high, arms and legs asprawl in the air, and fell with a dull crash into the Kennel. But nobody seemed to care, and the sport went on. From windows women rained down earthen pots, which broke on the beast's back, and cut until the blood streamed, and the poor brute, spent and panting, bellowed piteously. Once more he gathered his ebbing strength and dashed round the corner of St. Paul's, men, women, children, and dogs in hot pursuit, and there in the now empty roadway some half-dozen injured wretches crawled painfully to the side and were dragged into the doorways, while two, gored in the body, lay inert and still, like the boy in the Kennel. Once more the rout swept out of Silver Street into the High Street, the bull now shambling along, its hide streaming with blood, one horn broken and dangling, while its bloodshot eyes and frothing mouth told the end was near. Folks who had

before sheltered in the houses now sallied out more boldly, and joined in battering the flanks and head of the poor spent brute. It made a last dash down the Ram Yard opposite, and the crowd fought and battled through the narrow gateway in pursuit. Presently something happened, for the shouts rose to yells of excitement, again and again repeated, and then died down, and folks began to stream back into the High Street talking loudly and excitedly. I asked a passer-by what had happened. He replied first by telling us we were two poltroons to sit up there like jackdaws on a church steeple when a bull run was towards. What had happened? Why the bull had leapt into the Castle Moat, and would have gone under the mill wheel, but Bailey Ericson threw a rope noose over its neck. They had tried to drag it up current to the bridge, but could not keep its head above water, and what with the rope and the stream it was drowned. A poor bull run! John Wever, the man-at-arms, had just got ready to hamstring it, and show what a good broadsword could do, when it jumped. Not half as good a bull as last Hok Tide, which had killed four men and a woman, took the water at Batts' Ford, smashed the boat that went after it, gored Dame Allison's boy, who was swimming to hamstringing it, and finally had to be shot by old Peter Batts' crossbow. Good bull that!†

Once a party of mounted merchants, gaily dressed and followed by loaded sumpter mules, galloped through, going to Leicester, I heard, and watered their horses at the George. And there rode by the great William de Beauchamp, Baron of Bedford, hawk on wrist, followed by four Esquires, going hawking, so folks said, with Sir John Seynt John, and to him all caps were doffed.

Once a great lumbering coach came through with four horses abreast, and a postilion, four armed varlets sitting on a low bench in front behind the postilion and four more on the wide step behind. It was constructed like a long archway, gaily painted, with tapestried windows. From the window looked out a fair lady in a two-horned headdress with a little boy in a sharp peaked cap with peacock feathers. She hurriedly opened a pouch and flung a handful of money among the crowd and she and the boy laughed and clapped their hands as the crowd fought and jostled over the coins, and then the four horses broke into a gallop and the great coach lurched and bumped over the rough road, while people fled out of its way, and disappeared round the corner of St. Peter's Church.

I grew tired of the riot, for it contrasted weirdly with the "Great Silence" of last night, and the wistful face of Dom James Boteler haunted me. So leaving C.B. to watch a juggler swallowing swords to a gaping circle and deaf to the shrieking sermon of a mendicant friar I wandered away across the moat into the great dusty, stone-bestrewn courtyard of the deserted Castle, now, as a line of empty carts showed, being used as a stone quarry. Suddenly beneath the wall by the river I came across an elderly man and woman, decently dressed, kneeling in the dust muttering their prayers and telling their beads, while in front of them a cross of white water lilies lay on the ground. Presently they crossed themselves and rose and made me a respectful salutation and we fell to talk. They like myself were out of tune with Hok Tide. Would I deign to rest awhile in their house hard by the Church of St. Cuthbert, which was

† A Fenland proverb runs: "Mad as the baited bull at Stamford." This fashion of bull fighting in the open street was once common in most towns, and continued in Stamford until 1838.

out of the noise of "Hyhe Street," and so it came that I sat on the pergola or balcony of their solar chamber overlooking the river, towards Duck Mill, and listened to their simple talk. He, Robert de Menyl, mercer, was the last of his race. When the soldiers of the Empress Maud occupied the Castle of Bedford, it had been a sore time for the burgesses, for houses were burnt and many men, women and children were slaughtered in the streets. His father when a little boy had escaped alone of all his family, from the burning house, and been fostered by a kindly neighbour. He himself had seen the wicked King John come riding with his company over Bedford Bridge, a crafty evil-looking man, glancing suspiciously right and left at the crowd as though he feared an assassin's dagger. He had halted a few hours at the Castle to parley with and threaten the Baron of Bedford and then on again on his ceaseless, restless journeyings, for he never rested more than a night anywhere. His had been evil days. There had come the dreadful Interdict of His Holiness Innocent III., when the churches were shut, the altars stripped, the crosses, the relics, the images, and statues of the saints, the very bells from the towers were laid on the ground and covered over as though the air would pollute them. The rites of Holy Church, save baptism of infants and the last Sacrament to the dying were denied to all. The dead were buried in ditches or common fields without prayer, holy water or blessing. Meat was forbidden all the year as in Lent, no holiday or game allowed, men might not even shave the beard or attend to decent attire. It had seemed as though the very wrath of God was poured out upon them, the seven vials of the Blessed Apocalypse. At last came the joyful news that the evil king was dead over there eastwards at Swineshead Priory and the eighteen years of terror were over. And for a time they were at peace save for Faulke de Breauté in the Castle who robbed whom he would like a King's Purveyor.

A few years on, six years ago, the young King, a fair stripling of eighteen years, rode over the bridge and for three days a pursuivant with blast of trumpet each morning summoned the garrison to open the gates to the King's Grace. On the last morning the great Archbishop Stephen Langton stood besides the King before the Castle gate and after trumpets had sounded solemnly with Bell, Book and Candle excommunicated Faulke de Breauté and William de Breauté and all who should abet them against their Sovereign Liege. The siege began, and all through the summer of 1224 it was a time of fear and death, for the great stones of the mangonelles crashed into houses and killed many day after day. And here the old man's voice broke as he talked on. They had an only son Peterkin, lay brother and Keeper of the Fish Stews at Newnham Priory, a good and loving son. They had begged him not to venture nigh the town, but he would ever leave his fish stews to visit them. Then for two weeks he did not come and they had gone to the Ostiarius at the Lodge gate of Newnham to be told that he was drowned; that his cap and fish nets had been found on the swan walk of the fish holding, nigh the Moat, and they had mourned him with much weeping as dead. And presently the Castle fell before a last great assault. Pursuivants with blast of trumpet summoned all, men, women and children, within the bailiwick of Bedford, to assemble in the Castle Courtyard to see the King's vengeance on traitors. And so they two had stood in the crowd to see the end. The garrison, with bound arms and halters round their necks were marched to the courtyard where ten great gallows had been erected. The prisoners had stood in ranks of ten deep—William de Breauté and his Knights in front, then the esquires and beyond the common kind. But first the great

Lady Margaret de Redvers, wife, unwilling, so men said, of Faulke de Breauté was brought before the King, to whom she kneeled and spoke many words, and after awhile the King did courteously raise her and addressed her kindly words, and bade her go free to Bletsoe. And then he spake angry words of scorn to the prisoners. Rank by rank they were hanged on the gallows, first the Knights, all save one who was cut down alive and set free because he was a Knight Templar of the Holy Sepulchre of Christ. And at length came the turn of the last rank and in it stood—Peterkin.

* * * * *

After a burst of re-awakened grief they told me the tragedy of this home by the Church of St. Cuthbert. One alone of the garrison had escaped by diving from the Castle wall and he had told them. Peterkin had been fishing on a foggy morning in the holding and some of the garrison stole on him unawares and carried him captive into the Castle. There he had been kept close prisoner in a dungeon, sharpening quarrels and grinding stones for the mangonelles, until the end came; and this was the meaning of that cross of water lilies in the dust below the Castle wall.

* * * * *

In front of the Moot House a gleeman tuned his harp and the crowd grew still as he sang in a beautifully modulated tenor a lay of Robin Hood. This ended, he was joined by a dissipated looking monk who had evidently fled some religious house. With a huge flagon of wine in his hand from which he drank at the end of each verse, he trolled out in Latin, in a rich bass voice, the gleeman picking up the air on his harp.

“ Ave! color vini clari,
Dulcis potus, non amari,
Tua nos inebriari
Digneris potentia!
O! quam placens in colore!
O! quam fragrans in odore!
O! quam sapidum in ore!
Dulce lingue vinculum!
Felix venter quem intrabis!
Felix guttur quod rigabis!
Felix os quod tu lavabis!
Et beata labia! ”

—LONGFELLOW. “ *The Song of Lucifer* ” in *The Golden Legend*.

By the applause and the many groats thrown to them this was a popular programme.

A tapster at the George Gate, idle now the feast was over, told me there were many sports I could go and see. Mains of cocks were being fought in Mill Street, but the great main of the Baron's cockerel would be at half after nine to-night in Coltes Lane. Then the archers were shooting in Mikesgate at 2; there was a bear baiting and a badger fight with dogs and a duck hunting in the river, and a man would walk over the river on a rope. Best of all a troupe of players would play “ *The Harrowing of Hell*,”* in the George yard at five of the clock.

* The “ *Harrowing of Hell*,” of which several MSS. of various versions are in existence, is one of the earliest Middle English Miracle plays. The original MSS. is not in existence, but is supposed to have been written in the early part of the XIII. Century, and so about the date of *Hok Tide* in Bedford. Many monographs have been written upon the play.

I found C.B. in the George Courtyard, where the play was preparing for which a vast van had been wheeled into the Court. Meanwhile as we wait we wander round divers little stalls whose owners chaffered their wares to the crowd. Here a herbalist described bottles and boxes which would cure anything from the sweating sickness to flea bites, even offering the elixir of life, all of which were bought eagerly.

A Pardoner offered me a twelve months' indulgence, provided I sang one hundred and two Psalms, for twenty groats. He had for sale a plank of Noah's ark, feathers from St. Peter's cock, hairs from the tail of St. Joseph's ass and a stone from the Holy Sepulchre. The place swarmed with beggars, pedlars, and poor folk, lame, blind, goitred, pock-marked and of every deformity.

A stout well dressed burgess, seated beside us, kindly explained the points of the play, when the side of the great waggon was taken down and the play began. The interior was painted crudely to represent flames and the door at the back was the gateway out of Hell. Christ was going down into Hell and he would fight Beelzebub and the devils and break down the door and release the people from Hell. Yonder player in a long white robe with his face gilded gold was the Blessed Christ. Beelzebub was arrayed in a bullock's skin, horns on head and dangling hoofs with blackened face, while some half dozen attendant devils in like costume had faces painted green. Among other actors on the scene one came on dressed up as a gigantic sort of green crocodile and greatly amused the audience by working his jaws up and down by a string. This, my neighbour told me, was the great dragon of the Pit.

The Christ and the devils delivered interminable speeches with occasional scuffles which greatly amused the audience, though generally they were devout and often crossed themselves. Occasionally the actors were served with pots of mead which they stopped the play to drink. After about an hour and a half things appeared to reach a climax. The white-robed man seized one devil after another and flung them over the front into the court-yard, where they lay contentedly drinking mead. Then after a desperate contest with Beelzebub himself, he, too, was flung into the court-yard and beguiled the time with a flirtation with a maiden in the audience until he should be wanted again. Then the white-robed man after much endeavour broke down the door of Hell, in the back of the stage, and proceeded to bring in various persons, who, my neighbour informed me, were apostles and saints, who began fresh interminable dialogues—but we had had enough. There seemed no sign of the play ending though the audience continued in rapt attention. Evening was coming on and it behoved us to find beds.

The inn seemed empty, even of the shrill voiced Jacqueline, so fending for ourselves we foraged for food and then climbing the stairs, found an empty bedchamber over the gateway and wedged the door with such scant furniture as there was, for fear the room should be disputed. What with a sleepless night at Cauldwell Priory and the varied experiences of the day, we were both exhausted, and content to watch the crowd from the open dormer window over the great gateway. The din seemed to increase as the evening wore on as here they danced, there they fought. Torches were lit and processions formed up and down the street wherein the mummers, the white-robed man, the troupe of devils and the great dragon went up and down with wild antics. And, yes, surely there in yellow stockings, jerkin and cap, is Master Ambrose, the novice, Mistress Audrey Pynkes, as I presume, on one arm and Robert Perkyns, minor clerk

and tapster, on the other. Spying us at the dormer window Ambrose hailed us gleefully and bade us to accompany them to the great cock fight in Coltes Lane. Mistress Audrey smiled up at us, saying that Ambrose was her good Coz. and might yet be a Prior or a Bishop. We declined the invitation, and away they went.

One last scene below the window. Peter de Saulsby, with bandaged head and exceedingly drunk, is dragged to the stocks by two Bailiffs and locked in in company with a poor half fainting woman of the town, with dishevelled hair and blackened eyes. Seeing a respectable looking citizen under the window I threw him down a shilling and bade him fetch the poor woman a stoop of wine, but keep it out of reach of Peter, which he did.

Meanwhile Peter de Saulsby started to sing drunkenly at the pitch of his voice—

“ Here is ane cord baith great and long
 Quhilk hang it Johne the Armistrang
 Of gude hemp soft and sound
 Gude hail peopell I stand for’d
 Quha ever bless hangit with this cord
 Needs never to be drowned.”

This he continued to sing in maudlin fashion over and over again to our great annoyance until two Bailiffs coming along with their staves beat him over the shins and finally put a gag in his mouth, for they evidently knew Peter as a ruffian.

Long into the night the racket went on so that sleep was impossible. People came and beat upon our door and cursed us that the room was theirs and tried to force a way in, but the furniture was stout and heavy and we held our tongues. Jacqueline had not exaggerated, for as I looked out into the great court-yard people were sleeping stretched out on the ground in the open though a light rain had come on. And so finally with the echo of the noise in my ears and a confused vision of Dom James Boteler and Peterkin de Menyl oppressing my brain, I slept.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEDFORD BRIDGE IN 1533.

THE QUEEN : "Remember me
In all humility unto his highness :
Say his long trouble now is passing
Out of this world ; tell him, in death I bless'd him,
For so I will. Mine eyes grow dim. Farewell,
My lord. Griffith, farewell. Nay, Patience,
You must not leave me yet : I must to bed ;
Call in more women. When I am dead, good wench,
Let me be us'd with honour ; strew me over
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
I was a chaste wife to my grave ; embalm me,
Then lay me forth : although unqueen'd, yet like
A queen, and daughter to a king, inter me.
I can no more."

—SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VIII.*

C.B. and I rose after a sleepless night, wherein strange things had bit and stung us; from our hard board beds with aching limbs, stumbled down the steep stairs and washed as best we could in the trough in the great court-yard, and so to breakfast where we were alone, for the inn had emptied of guests. Somehow the room looked different, and less squalid than overnight. A few poor daubs of ugly looking saints hung on the wall; the furniture was better, with a buffet of carved oak, I did not recall, with the remains of a swan, a partly carved boar's head and a huge game pasty set out on it. There were rough earthenware plates on the table instead of last night's wooden platters. The fat waiting maid too who served us was less dirty and slatternly than Jacqueline of yesterday. Yes! the place was somehow furnished up. Breakfast finished with a draught of honey mead from a great silver tankard, with a lid and bowl of some green stoneware, and I called for the bill. The fat serving wench proceeded to reckon up on a white board with a burnt stick. The reckoning was in "angels." This puzzled me. Yesterday a sixpence or a shilling had seemed to answer all demands, and in fact was pocketed with avidity, but somehow I seemed dimly to recollect that an angel was something about equivalent to 7/6. To solve my difficulty I deposited a sovereign on the table. She looked at it, rang it on the table, glanced round furtively to see if the tapster were watching, and quickly slipped the sovereign down her stocking. From her pouch she produced a silver coin, like a florin, and proceeded to put it in a wooden box which was evidently the till. She smiled sweetly upon us. Whenever their Honours rode to the George let them ask for Mistress Lomas and she would herself look to our beds and food. I felt a sort of confused conviction that I had been cheated and muttered something about "change." Thereupon she shouted through the doorway "Ostler, change of horses for their Honours," and whisked out of the room. I dimly suspected she had profited to the extent of 300 per cent. deeming me a foreigner from strange parts, but further parley was useless and we sallied out bags in hand.

I rubbed my eyes, for somehow the street did not look the same. The pump and stocks and pillory were still there; the street still muddy, dirty and

full of puddles from last night's rain, but now cobbled; the same noisome smelling kennel, but the shops looked bigger and better, half timbered houses and shops with overhanging storeys and gabled dormers, with projecting signs, while last night they were low, wooden, thatched hovels. Just on my right was one looking very new. Somehow it seemed familiar to me out of some dim distant past. Where had I seen it before? I remembered it quite well when I was a boy, just as I see it now. But when was I a boy? Its jutting windows above and below were just the same. I knew that in some phase of my life one Alderman Tokelove Grey, a former Mayor of Bedford, was a wine merchant here and a little passage went up to the yard behind in the middle. Yes it was just the same, and then I remembered how its quaint lower windows and door were pulled out and instead there were the marble slabs and open shop of a fishmonger and a butcher.

Something strange has happened, for the whole of the Castle building has gone, and a row of shops and houses are there. I stroll up a lane marked Castle Lane. Why, there is no moat, and I am looking over a rough field with heaps of broken stones, and there is the mound where last night I saw the tower of the Keep with the great breach in it made by the mangonels, now covered with rough bushes; while away to the right is a line of broken ruined wall and through the gaps I catch sight of the river and the willow trees beyond. It is very strange.

A brown cowed bearded Franciscan Friar comes over the field, and I ask him what day of the month this is? "The 17th day of the month of August." What year? He stares at me and remarks that wine and strong drink were a wile of the devil. "The year of our Redemption 1533, and the 26th year of the reign of His Highness Henry VIII. whom may God preserve, from evil counsellors" and he goes on his way, his sandals clattering on the cobbles.

C.B. and I stare at each other in nervous bewilderment. We had gone to bed last night and slept three hundred years. Yes! we might have known. People were differently dressed. Look at this young gallant! "What doth this waterfly?" No long shoes, with toes drawn up, and long robes, like the young sparks at the George last night. This one comes picking his way through mud and puddles in doubtlet and ruff and trunk hose, with a large plumed velvet hat. And yonder pedlar is different in dress, though there goes a countryman in the same old smock frock. We pass the fish stalls at the east end of St. Paul's and peep down an open lane at the church. Last night it was largely a ruin after the handling of Faulke de Breauté, and battered into ruins by the mangonels and petraries from the Ballium of the Castle. Now it is all restored and the steeple and nave look very much as I remember it as a boy, but somewhat larger. And as we near the bridge there is an inn with "Ye Signe of Ye Swan" where the corner tower of the Castle had stood and where the outer walls returned along the river. But we stop our peering about for evidently something is astir; for people are flocking out of the side lanes and locking up shops and leaving booths in charge of boys, with threatening gestures as though bidding the boys desert the stalls if they dare. "You rascal Piers, so will I with the scourge to your breech, if ye leave the botcher stall against the time I do return. Sithee by God's Blood will I flay thy hide." Folks are crowding to the foot of the bridge.

I stop an aged burgess and his dame and ask what is afoot with all this stir. "'Tis said the good Queen Katharine of Aragon, our sovereign liege Lady, is coming through Bedford on her way from the Manor of Ampthill,

where she hath been of late, on her way to Kimbolton, some say to Buckden. Folks do say, but we know little of the matter, that on 10th May last Master Cranmer, my Lord of Canterbury, did read in the Lady Chapel of Dunstable Priory a bill of divorcement, a mensa et toro, wherein the good Queen was called a 'contumacious woman,' and all loyal subjects of His Highness were bidden to style her not 'Queen,' but 'Princess Dowager of Wales,' but we know not of such matters. It is a dangerous thing to talk of princes, for the hand of the King is long and his shadow lies dark over all the land." The butcher in blue smock joined us. A messenger, he had news, had ridden from Ampthill to the Mayor that morning at 8 to tell of the Queen's passing. The Mayor, the Bailiffs, the Chamberlain and Town Clerk were now sitting in secret session at the Moot House opposite. I glanced up at the Moot House, and through the upper window I could see a man in a red furred gown speaking excitedly and gesticulating to others whom I could not see. Three months ago they would have welcomed on bended knee with obsequious words this great Lady, daughter of the high and puissant Prince Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile—their sovereign liege Lady. But now—their sovereign liege Lady of course—but what of that letter of divorcement? It behoved them, the butcher opined, to be discreet, they were guardians of the Ancient Charter of Bedford, granted by King Henry III. They wot not what "Princess Dowager" might mean. The great Henry, whom might God, the blessed Virgin and her Son and all the Saints have in keeping—well—he was an austere man, his hand was heavy, his command was swift, and there was the Charter. A passing monk paused to listen and passed on, scornfully remarking—" *Filii hujus sæculi prudentiores sunt.*" I seemed to hear it all up there in the secret session in the Moot House as though I sat at the table with the Mayor. And presently a beadle comes down the stairs to the door and rings a bell. "Oyez! Oyez!" and he reads a proclamation exhorting all burgesses and loyal lieges of His Highness to keep within doors, and make no brawling to the disturbance of the King's Peace, within the Borough and Bailliwick of Bedford, between the hours of 9 and 12 noon, that day the 17th day of August in the year of Our Lord 1533.

Yes, they were discreet men, the Mayor and Bailiffs. The same Friar joined the group; he said the burgesses were like the Blessed Apostle St. Peter, who denied his Lord; and that hussy Nan Bullen was the serving maid who did misguide the Blessed Apostle. The Botcher retorted that the Blessed Apostle St. Peter could very well look after himself, and as for the said Nan Bullen, he did hear she was a comely wench, and Great Hal could wive whom he liked, for all he Peter the Botcher cared; but the Charter—it behoved the Mayor and Bailiffs to look well to that, and they were politic men to resolve to stay at home. The Friar retorted angrily, and it looked like blows coming between him and the Botcher. What did he Peter, a slayer of beaves and hogges, know of such things? This same matter of Nan Bullen was like to be for the undoing of the realm. Had not the great Lord Cardinal Wolsey fallen from his Highness's favour, and died of chagrin of heart, for the same matter? His friend, the sub-prior of Dunstable, had been there in the Palace of Blackfriars, where had been Wolsey and Campeggio, and the King and the Queen, for the trial, and told him of the King's hot choler against Bishop Fisher of Rochester, who denied he had ever signed his name with the bishops to the license of enquiry as to the marriage. "Here is your hand and seal," cried the King. Whereon the Bishop boldly replied it was a forgery; no, nor had he permitted it to be

signed for him, as my Lord of Canterbury fondly imagined. "If I wished it to be done why could I not have done it myself?" Those were his words. But it would go hard with him from the King's anger; already, so he heard, he and Master Moore lay in London Tower for refusing an oath. And as for the good Queen, he did hear that when my Lord Mountjoy did come a sennight ago to Ampthill to read to her of what had been done in the Lady Chapel at Dunstable Priory, she did take the parchment from his hand, and with her own hand did draw her pen through "Princess Dowager," wherever it did occur written therein.

Meanwhile, a man in long robe, whom the Friar greeted as "Chirurgeon," had joined the group, who had much to say of the Holy Maid of Kent, how—so men said—the Host was carried to her through the air from Calais, that she had denounced the divorce and written to the Pope. She had prophesied that His Grace would not live six months, and if it came to his ears the Maid would hang for all her holiness.

The Prior had heard how one Father Peto had preached at Greenwich before Henry, on Ahab the oppressor, and how Dr. Curwin did preach the next Sunday from the same pulpit against Father Peto. Another of the brethren, Father Elstow, had rebuked him from the rood screen, whereon they both clamoured against each other until his Grace, mad with anger, leaned out of the Closet, shook his fist at them, called them "accursed shavelings," and vowed he would hang them both.

Meanwhile the Crier is again making proclamation, but the people take no note of Crier, Oyez! and proclamation, and continue to crowd to the bridge head. Presently the crowd divides, and many fall on their knees and cross themselves, for down the lane, called Castle, comes a procession of monks headed by a Crucifer, and behind him a robed Prior, with golden cross on his breast. Yes, that was Prior Henry of Newnham, and from behind St. Paul's comes a like procession with the Prior of the Grey Friars. Up the bridge we can see the people backing against the bridge parapet, to clear a way for the Prior of Cauldwell; and presently there comes another procession of Nuns with the Abbess of Elstow following the Crucifer. These processions form in one, and stand in a body before the Swan Inn great coach way. And here comes the great Sir John Seynt John to join the ecclesiastics.

C.B. and I squeeze forward until we are close up against the bridge parapet. I glance round to see across the river the old familiar willows, and the islands, and an ancient hostel, "The Buoy and Oar," and on the Swan side a fair garden with steps to the water, a horse wash where horses are splashing in the river, a line of tumbled ruined walls reflected in the stream and the shaggy castle mound behind. A murmur from the crowd, and then over the bridge head come riding two mounted men-at-arms, clearing the folks away roughly with their halberds; and then behind, mounted on a palfry, whose red velvet saddle is blazoned with the Royal Crown and Tudor Roses, and below a great golden pomegranate, her own device of Granada, rides a stately lady. Checked by the crowd in front, too closely packed to be easily parted, the procession comes to a halt on the bridge, and I have a view of her Highness. The face, as in the Holbein at Versailles, is oval, with regular features, large, dark eyes, and a brunette complexion, though sorrow had swallowed it, while a look of calm, sweet repose brooded over the face. I noted the four-cornered hood cap, with a black mantilla veil depending from the back. Clusters of rubies are linked with strings of pearls around throat and waist, and a cordeliere

belt of jewels hangs to her feet. Her robe is of dark blue velvet, her sleeves straight with ruffles, and over them great hanging sleeves of sable fur of the shape called "rebras." A right royal and noble lady! Behind her four waiting women on palfries; then a great curtained horse litter, and a train of men and maids riding pillion, followed by a great waggon full of red velvet covered trunks, the procession closed by four mounted arquebusiers. Every head is bared, and silence falls on the crowd, save here and there a voice gives her God-speed and a Good Deliverance. She turns her dark Spanish eyes at the sound, and a tremulous, half-grateful smile sweeps over the proud, beautiful face, as she bows graciously. And then a sudden interruption came. The same wild-eyed, bearded Friar, who had followed us, scrambled to the parapet of the bridge, and cried in a thundering voice, which echoed down the street, "God's curse and the curse of Holy Church on the strumpet Nan Bullen." His voice is drowned in a sudden uproar, as two mounted men try to force their horses from behind through the crowd on the bridge, and curses and shrieks arise as the people battle to stop the horses riding them down. One soldier hurls a mace at the Friar, which misses him and falls splashing into the river. "Mother of God, the Friar will dance on air for that at Gallows Corner if they catch him." "The river—Father—take to the river." The Friar shakes an angry fist at the soldier, turns, poises himself on the parapet with outstretched arms, and dives over; a splash, and he is up, striking out for the islands on the south bank, while the arquebusiers vainly try to force their way back into Mikesgate, to cut him off, but the block is too dense behind them. The face of the Queen is set and rigid as though she had heard naught. The disordered procession forms again, and the velvet saddled palfry halts before the group of prelates. A serving man holds the stirrup, and the great lady, aunt of an Emperor, King's daughter, and a King's wife—*pace* Archbishop Cranmer in the Lady Chapel of Dunstable Priory—kneels in the street and kisses the signet ring of the Lord Prior of Newnham. I crane over to see all I can, wedged as I am by the pressing crowd, until my ribs seem like to crack. I hear the murmur of prayer, the acolytes swing the censers towards the Queen, and the smoke rises above the crowd; and I just catch the Prior's blessing, given with uplifted hand, "Vade in pace et Dominus sit tecum." As she turns and remounts I see tears streaming down her cheeks, which she hastily wipes away with her kerchief, and bravely smiles and bends her head to the crowd; and slowly the procession winds away out of sight by St. Peter's Church. The throng begins to break up; a few bruised and cut in the scuffle limp away; the Priors and the Abbess resume their home march. They, at least, will not truckle, as yet, to the powers of darkness. *Retro Satanas.* I have seen yet one more episode in those troubled days, whereof the winds ruffle the placid day-life of this ancient Bailliwick of Bedford beside the Ouse.

* * * * *

There, at Buckden, which presently we shall pass, on the Ouse, she stayed until January, 1535, a broken-hearted woman, forsaken of husband, bereft of child. In summer time she would pace with troubled heart beside the Ouse, where

On either side the river lie,
Long fields of barley and of rye;
That clothe the wold and meet the sky,
And through the fields the road runs by
To many towered Camelot.

What visions of "many towered Camelots" she had known! The great beleaguered Camp of Granada, the Field of the Cloth of Gold, pageant, banquet and tourney, and high royal estate; and now this Ouse-side village and the river creeping fenwards.

Another January, at Kimbolton Castle, and the once proud heart of the poor, defenceless woman, who had withstood and cowed Cardinals and Archbishop, and the great King himself, is at length quelled and broken, and Queen to the last by her own claim and in the hearts of her people—she meets her end.

Sir Edward Bedingfield, the castellan, writes: "7th Jan., about 10 o'clock, the Lady Dowager was aneiled with the Holy ointment; Master Chamberlain and I being called to the same, and before two in the afternoon she departed to God. I beseech you that the King may be advertised of the same"! Advertised of the same! What need? Well advertised enough by that pathetic letter penned a few hours before her death, with its closing words: "Lastly do I vow that mine eyes desire you above all things." Strange contrast of the human heart, which in one can be pitiless and hard as the nether millstone, in another forgiving "even until seventy times seven."

There remains but a grave "on the north side of the altar," marked by a humble brass, within the Abbey Chancel of Peterborough—spared from the general destruction soon to befall church and monastery, because it was her resting place. That, and a trunk, covered with red velvet, marked with a "K.R." and a royal crown on the lid, in Kimbolton Castle.

We find our canoe still aground by "the privie staire of the Chantry" under the bridge. The bridge looks just the same as last night, though more time-worn, the Chantry still jutting out into the stream, with the two gatehouses, though 300 years had passed in the night. The Friar who had caused the commotion is sitting peacefully on the grass of the island on our right in an under shirt of horsehair, wringing out his cowl. We drop down past the fair garden of the Swan, with its mouldering castle walls, ease the canoe over the stone barrage, past an inlet where probably once issued the moat, which we had so narrowly escaped the morning before. There, on the north bank, with a returning wall and postern gate towards the bridge, stretched a long wall right to Newnham, leaving a narrow in-walled pathway of some 5ft.—a swan walk—all along this bank. Here and there along the path monks and lay brothers were fishing, and now and again a great bream came splashing up to the rod. I questioned one of them. I would have speech of the Lord Prior of Newnham; would he direct me to the Gate house? He said it was an ill time to call and have speech of the Prior, for he was a sore troubled and perplexed man. In the Chapter yesterday he had spoken of the many troubles of these days; of how the godly Master Moore, the Chancellor, was in London Tower, and the holy Bishop Fisher of Rochester. There was talk of a Visitor coming to enquire of the properties and messuages of the Priory. Meanwhile the Prior had gone to greet the Queen on her way from Ampthill at the bridge. Could I tell him of her passing, he had heard the sound of an uproar up stream. Was her Grace well to see? But of the Prior—he would be now going on his palfrey to hawk at Reynold, as was his wont when his mind was beset with troubles and with

"accidie" of spirit. The Sub-Prior? Well, the Sub-Prior was the Sub-Prior, a man over moody and silent. No, he did not think his reception of two strolling boaters would be gracious; so with the exchange of a "Pax vobiscum" and a "grammercy for your courtesy, Father," we leave him to bait his hook and watch his float.

* * * * *

And so still in a dreamlike wonderment at these days we were living in, wherein if they were old, old things looked strangely familiar, strangely like what? the things we had always known, we carried the canoe over to the Lower River, and dropped down past Cardington Mill to Castle Mills.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ANTIQUARIAN AND A ROYAL PAIR ON THE OUSE IN 1541.

" 'Tis better to be lowly born
And range with humble livers in content
Than to be perked up in a glistening grief
And wear a golden sorrow."

—SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VIII.*

WE had paddled past Fenlake, with its reminiscences of Heenan the prize fighter, and by Cardington, with its worthier record of that "Saint and Martyr," John Howard, the philanthropist, and we ease up at the lock of Castle Mills with its rough bush clad mound of Risinghoe on our left. I had ceased to be astonished at any thing, but I rub my eyes nevertheless. There, seated on the lock beam, busily talking to the flour powdered, gaberdined miller, sits a man clad in black velvet flat cap, long black cloak, full doublet, and trunk hose and yellow stockings. With inkhorn beside him and quill in hand he is jotting down the observations of the miller. The power of the "Goloshes of Fortune" enables me to recognise in his lean, wrinkled face, scraggy peaked beard and watery blue eyes—Master John Leyland the Antiquarian.† I reflect that though Shakespeare is still unborn, I must somehow season my conversation with this learned man by phrasing consonant to the period, and therefore search my mind for such Shakespearian tags as will serve the purpose best; and therefore advance upon him with a "I do desire they better acquaintance," Master Leyland. "Give me thy neif."

I am courteously received. I cannot reproduce verbatim our conversation which I peppered freely with Shakespearean interjections, wherein as C.B. subsequently informed me, I showed a shockingly loose knowledge of the "immortal William" and made myself very ridiculous. Did I understand Master Leyland to say he had visited Bedford, had had a collation with the Prior of Newnham, visited Willington and was now collecting information from yon miller? If so I would be glad to scan his notes, for this being a part of the Ouse of great historic interest whereon three learned friends of mine had written screeds of great erudition, to wit Doctor John Morris, Master A. G. Goddard and Master Beauchamp Wadmore, as also the learned Master Allcroft in his "British Mounds and Earthworks," I might correct aught amiss conveyed to him by yon miller, "a rascally, yea—forsooth, knave" whose knowledge was apt to miscarry. So I sit beside Master John Leyland and peruse his notes. His visit to Bedford added little and was nothing but of "many little holmes" in the river, of St. Paul's, of Prebendes and of Simon de Bello

† John Leyland, Antiquarian, 1506 to 1562, author of the "Itinerary or the Laboriouse Journey and Serche of Johnan Leylande for Englandes Antiquities. Geiven of hym as a New Yeares Gyfte to King Henry VIII. in the XXXVII. Yeare of his Raygne."

This visit to Bedford, Castle Mills, Willington, is told in Vol. I, Folio 117-118; Vol. V., Folio 9-98, 116. It is curious he should have seen fit to go into such close detail of this portion of the Ouse. I conclude he took a fancy to the miller.

Campo "Who lyeth afore the High Altare of St. Paules Bedeford" and such like. And then

"From Bedford to Castelle Mille. A little by weste from the Mylle upper on the Ryver be tokens wher a large Castelle hath biene but there apperith no maner of part of Building but it is easi to se wher the area of the Castelle was and the great round Hille wher the Keepe or Dungeon stood in clene hole and at this tyme* there groweth many rugh Bushes on it and there is a mighty strong and used borow of Greys and Foxes. As far as I can lerne the Castel by Castelle Mille was the Lorde Beauchampe's, Baron of Bedeford, but when it fell totally into ruine I have not yet lerned."—(Vol. I., Folio 118).

"The Castelle of Adingreaves is on the same side that the Castelle Mill is on, otherwise cauled Risingho, about a mile lower on the Ryver towards St. Neots, where is on a Hille a Diche and other Tokins of Buildings there, not two Balles Castes from the Ryver Bank."—(Vol. V., Folio 9 and 98).

The Ryver of Huse against the Castelle Myl breketh into two partes and closing agayne a litle beneth the Mylle maketh an Island. . . . The lesser streame serveth the Mil, passed first by a Bridge of Wood over this arme, and by and by over the mayne streame of Use Ryver by a Timber Bridge. And heere I lerned of the millar that there was another Bridge of Tymber on Use at ——— betwixt the Mylle and St. Neots. After that I passed over both these Bridges I entered into somewhat low ground where were very fair Medows and Pastures and so to Willington Village distant about half a mile from Castelle Mille. The village self of Willington is commodiously set in a fair gravelly ground and fair Wood in sum Places about it Mr. Gostwick beyng borne in Willington hath made a sumptuous new Building of Bricke and Tymber, a fundamentis, in it with a Conduit of Water derived in Leade Pipes. About a mile and a half beneath Adingreaves is a great Stone bridge of an VIII. arches of Stone at Berford (Barford) and there on "ulter ripa" is a good Up-landishe Towne. From Berford to Eiton (Eaton Socon) a good

* Here I am regrettably obliged to fall foul of that very excellent and learned work, the "Royal Victorian History of Bedfordshire." Describing the site and remains of Bedford Castle, it goes on to say, "By Leyland's time (1505-1562) the Castle Mill still remained but there were no buildings: he mentions, however, the 'great round Hille' as a burrow of foxes." ———

This astonishes me, as I thought Bedford folk were already playing bowls by Leyland's time on "the great round hille," and it was such an odd place for foxes to make burrows in if Bedfordians had any of the sporting proclivities of to-day. I was still more confounded when it goes on to quote Camden, writing a generation or so later, as speaking of the ruins still overhanging the river, while Leyland has just said that there were no buildings.

Reference to Leyland's Itinerary, Vol. I., Folio 118, enlightens me. The writer of the Royal Victoria History has not unnaturally confused the Castle Mill, Bedford, alluded to Chart R. 11, Edward II., m. 16, with Castle Mills, otherwise Risinghoe, and it was of the latter Leyland was speaking, as described in this chapter. Connecting Leyland's visit as he does with the Mill of the "Castle of Bedford," the historian makes a hopeless muddle, for it certainly did not exist in Leyland's day.

The moral is, it is dangerous to write the history of sites one has not carefully visited, and to use references which one has not verified.

village on "ulter ripa" about three mile, where be seen vestigia Castelli between the Church and the Ripe and almost hard on the Ripe and at this Eiton is a litle poore Bridge of Ease over the Ryver."

With a bow I hand back his notes to Master Leyland. "Grammercy," say I, "learned Sir, I thank you, but, for what you have "lerned" from this same knavish miller, know that if ye seek to "lerne" from folks whom you meet, be it on the "ulter" or "citerior ripe" of "Huse," i' fegs they are ever given to leasing. Now hearken to me. In primis, they spelling doth fly like a wild haggard. I note ye spell "Bedford" in three ways, "mill" in four ways, "timber" in three ways, "Ouse" in two ways and much of the like which doth cause me, erstwhile a pedagogue, great amaze. Now that same mound "cauled Risingho"; my three learned friends can tell you much more of it than yon miller, but anon "we will draw you the curtain and show you the picture." The "Castelle of Adingreaves" I know not, save you mean the Danish circular camp on "citerior ripe of the Use" yonder on the hill. But prithee, learned Sir, I would have ye to know that, having made an "itinerarie" to Willington ye have imagined a fond and foolish thing that the "sumptuous new building of Mr. Gostwick" and his "Leade pipes" are alone worthy of your 'laboriouse serche.' Gadzooks, my Master, prate not to me of Gostwicke's and pipe me no lead pipes. At Willington there is that of which I am to discourse wonders and by my halidom I will tell you everything right as it fell out. Put thy "fardels" into yon shallop and with me and this young man (my son, Master Leyland, yclept C.B., presently to go to Oxenford, a youth "full of wise saws and modern instances" as an egg of meat, as is the manner of youth)—let us hie to Willington and there on the "ulter ripe of Ouse" will I make discourse. Doff ruff and doubtlet, truss up thy points, pull up they hosen and to the oar. As Shakespeare says—ah I bethink me you know him not—have a care, step warily into ye shallop or you do cast us all into the "streame." "I will scarce think ye have swam in a gondola."

* * * * *

Having conveyed Master Leyland to the shore of Willington I proceeded to point out to him

"Out of my lean and low ability."

what is undoubtedly one of the most interesting earthworks in England, the Danish Seaburgh of Willington, which has been so well explained by Allcroft in "Earthworks of England" and by A. R. Goddard in "The Danes on the Ouse." I indignantly swept aside his suggestion that they looked to be only "dukkes ponds" and bade him cease to talk of Mr. Gostwicke's "leade Pipes" and attend to what lay before him, while I did

"Pluck out the heart of my mystery"

The map reproduced from Mr. Beauchamp Wadmore's book explains Allcroft's description:—

"Of the three basins the larger, No. 1, formed by an expansion of the moat of the inner ward, measures as much as 105 feet wide and 170 feet long, although the railway has sadly truncated its original proportions. It still contains a little water, and before the railway dammed its mouth it was a broad fairly deep inlet of the river calculated to accommodate between twenty and thirty Danish "ceols." At its southern end a passage 25 feet wide opens into a second oblong basin, No. 2, 110 feet by 60 feet. The third basin, No. 3,

much smaller was apparently intended to dock but one vessel at a time, 72 feet by 35 feet with a depth of 6 feet. Traces remain of what seem to be slip ways running up from this from the larger basin. This was guarded by the camp on the opposite side of the river." This I presume is the spot Master Leyland calls "Adingreaves." Goddard, referring to the small basin, No. 3, suggests that it was a "naust" or ship shed, viz., for a single ship under repair.

Master Leyland was by now eagerly questioning me on the purport of this seaburgh, and having invited him to sit down upon "the ripe of Ouse" I was about to link together Willington, his "castel of Adingreaves," the mound of Risingho and the Danish attack upon Bedford in 921 when there came a sudden interruption.

A few moments before we had been rather startled to hear a fanfare of trumpets from the direction of the village. Suddenly above us on the bank appeared a man whose figure looked gigantic in his puffed sleeves and wide mantle. Some twenty yards behind halted a small group of gentlemen, with grooms leading horses. There he stood with his great red stockinged legs wide apart, a jersfalcon, the privileged bird of royalty, on wrist, staring moodily at the river. I noted the great gold collar with its pendant of St. George round his neck, but it was the face which rivetted me. It was an immensely wide face, with reddish hair scantily fringing a small pursed up mouth, the eyes mere narrow slits set near together and their glance was like the topaz eyes of a tiger. Below, the chin descended fold after fold into his collar and the cheeks hung heavy and pendulous. It was a face of immense power, animal in every line of it, almost brutish save for the steady stare of the baleful eyes and the tight lips. I scarcely noted Master Leyland's smothered exclamation "It is the King's Grace" for I had divined the man of blood—Henry VIII.—sunning himself on the banks of the Ouse like some monstrous carrion brute.

Suddenly he glanced our way and a loud harsh voice exclaimed "God's Body! Who are ye, ye fellows? Come hither." Master Leyland with doffed hat and mincing, obsequious tread, preceded us. The King thrust out his hand and as Master Leyland knelt to kiss it I noted the great straight coarse fingers, with thick hair upon the back of the hand, and on the thumb the great red stone, the Regal of France, which Cromwell had plundered from the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

In answer to the King's abrupt question, "What errand here, man?" Master Leyland, in shaking tones, was beginning to explain that he was composing a book of itinery of His Grace's dominions as a new year's gift to His Highness. The King seemed to take little note of him, for something seemed to have gone wrong with the jesses, bewits and leash of the falcon and he was impatiently fingering them and muttering angrily. Suddenly from the osier beds down stream came a cry from the beaters, and a heron and bittern got on the wing. The King waived Master Leyland roughly aside, unhooded the falcon and slipped the leash, put the bird close to his cheek with almost a tender caress, seeming to whisper to it, and cast it off after the heron, halloing it on to its prey. Two grooms ran forward, trotting a huge black courser by the bridle and offered the stirrup. With one foot in the stirrup the King watched for a moment as the heron rose with astonishing rapidity in narrow spirals, while the falcon "ringing" more widely climbed after the quarry, and then with a speed and activity which seemed impossible for his gigantic bulk, he flung himself into the saddle, spurred his horse and galloped away over the meadows towards Fenlake, while Sir John Gostwicke and the gentlemen of the train mounted in

haste and followed hard after him.† Presently as Master Leyland wiped a sweating brow and tried to recover his presence of mind after this redoubtable rencontre, there came the sound of hoofs galloping on the turf and a party of ladies, followed by two squires, reined up to ask if we had seen the King's Grace and which way he went. At their head was a slight girlish figure, with light brown hair rippling from under a close red riding cap. It was a winsome smiling face, fair—blue-eyed with a retroussé nose and large red full lips—the King's fifth Queen Katherine Howard. It was seven years ago that I had seen another Katherine pass by Bedford Bridge and four wives had passed across the scene, poor Anne Boleyn, to die by the swordsman of Calais, Jane Seymour, by neglect, Anne of Cleves by divorce, welcomed joyfully by the bride, and this was their successor the "parvissima puella" as Linguard calls her. She bent her head graciously to us as we stood bareheaded, gave us a "Grammercy my masters" and galloped away in the direction indicated.

Master Leyland seemed well acquainted with the doings of Whitehall and Greenwich and of all that had led up to this royal visit to Willington by the Ouse. The King had been much displeased over the marriage with Anne of Cleves, into which he had entered all reluctantly, complaining to Cromwell who had arranged the match in the interests of the Protestant party, that he had been "sorely mishandled." The Catholic party, under the Duke of Norfolk, saw their chance of replacing her by a Catholic Queen, and the charms of Katherine Howard made it easy. Cromwell's turn had come. The *Malleus Monachorum*, or, as old Fuller has it—the Mauler of monasteries—had run his day. He was attainted for treason and heresy by Act of Parliament—charged with having been "the most corrupt traitor and deceiver of the King and Crown that had ever been known in his whole reign." It was in vain he sued for the King's clemency "Most gracious King, I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy." He found none from the ruthless Henry, nor any to pity his fate. On the day of his execution, the 28th of July, 1540, Henry wedded Katherine Howard, four days after the divorce of Anne of Cleves had been completed. Cranmer after scheming and accomplishing three royal divorces must have felt he had done enough, but his services in this direction were not yet finished.

The greater part of the honeymoon was joyously spent a few miles from Willington at Amptill, where one would think the shade of another Katherine must have haunted the mind of Henry. There they stayed until October 1st. Master Leyland talked much of the King's "great goodness," but he told a grim story of events which had punctuated this honeymoon; of Catholic divines who adhered to the supremacy of the Pope and Protestant divines who were steadfast opponents of the Papacy, dragged impartially to stake or gibbet

† This visit of Henry VIII. to Willington is told in Hankin's "Description of the Town of Bedford, 1828." "Henry VIII., to whom John Gostwick was Master of the Horse, was at Willington, at the family mansion, on the 21st October, 1541, where he held a Council. This latter circumstance is mentioned in the Council books in the library at Stowe." I should judge Sir John Gostwick was a servile sycophant of his master, and as such, put his hand to some very unsavoury tasks. The infamy and brutality of the executions of Anne Boleyn and Katharine Howard, on evidence manufactured and garbled, to suit the prearranged plan for their removal, has rarely been surpassed in history. Henry's disgusting thirst for plunder was always notorious, but it appears in its most loathsome form when he stooped to console his dishonour, if dishonour there were, by plundering the kindred of his unhappy queen, Katharine Howard, of plate, jewels, and money, as narrated in Strickland's "Queens of England."—"Sir John Gostwick and John Skinner were appointed to go to Ryegate to Lord William Howard's house, to take an inventory of all the money, jewels, goods and chattels they should find there, and bring the same to the Council." It is difficult to conceive greater infamy.

at Smithfield. But though the dog days of 1540 were shot with blood and terror, all went merry as a marriage bell at Amptill, Henry, charmed with the youth, beauty and vivacity of Katherine, who, cousin to Anne Boleyn, yet lacked her sharpness of tongue. In July, 1541, the little Queen and her unwieldy lord started to make a royal progress to the north, travelling *via* Northampton and Lincolnshire to York—"the King and Queen and all their train merry and in health," as secretary Wriothesley wrote. It was a time of pomp and pageantry and all the sweets of high estate for Katherine, with Henry her devoted slave. And then Master Leyland coughed and glanced nervously round as if he feared a bird of the air might carry what he had to say. There had been rumours and talk of the Queen. She had, when staying at Pontefract Castle, appointed as her secretary one Master Francis Dereham, who, men said, had been her lover aforetime—he it was in slashed velvet riding behind the Queen just now. She was the fifth wife and Master Cranmer had ever found ways of annulling marriages and the King—he was a gracious prince—but jealous. He had heard their Highnesses were returning to Hampton Court by way of Lincolnshire, but he had not thought to encounter them at Willington at the 'sumptuous new house' of Sir John Gostwick." Meanwhile he wished her Grace's Highness a long and happy life, for she was a "*pulcherrima puella*."

* * * * *

Miss Strickland in "Lives of the Queens of England," writes:—"The increase of the Queen's influence during the progress was beheld with jealous feelings by those who were naturally desirous of destroying her credit with the King, and the circumstance of the royal travellers resting one night at the house of Sir John Gostwick, who had during the preceding spring denounced Cranmer in open Parliament as the root of all heresies, was sufficiently alarming to the Primate. There was moreover a select meeting of the Privy Council, at which Gardiner presided, held at the Gostwick's house, affording strong confirmation to the assertions of Burnet and Rapin that Cranmer had reason to believe that he would very shortly follow Cromwell to the scaffold, unless some measures were found of averting the gathering storm." And he accordingly took them.

It is probable that the stay at Willington on the 21st of October, 1541, saw the first whispers of the coming storm and that Henry's moody staring at the Ouse portended tragedy. Willington was the last scene of Katherine's high estate. Things moved rapidly. On the feast of All Saints, November 1st, Henry and Katherine arrived from Willington at Hampton Court, "where the King received his Maker and gave him most hearty thanks for the good life he led and trusted to lead with his wife." The next day Cranmer, that pliant agent in the matrimonial embarrassments of Henry, gave him "certain information." Tradition tells of the poor distracted woman breaking away from the guard and rushing frantically through the long gallery at Hampton Court in a vain effort to reach Henry, but her enemies were too alert to risk the weapon of a woman's tears. The pitiful tale developed quick tragedy. Two months of lonely confinement at Sion House and then on the 11th of February, 1542, the assent of the King to the Bill of Attainder was given by commission and the fatal sentence "*Le Roi le veult*" was pronounced to the act "which deprived a Queen of England of her life without trial and loaded her memory with obloquy of so dark a hue that no historian has ventured to raise the veil of events and search how far the charges were based on fact." So writes Miss Strickland. Linguard, a very reliable historian, writes, "On a review of the original letters

in the state papers of the Act of Attainder and the proceedings in Parliament, I see no sufficient reason to think her guilty."

On the 13th of February she was executed. Miss Strickland comments " Thus died in the flower of her age and in the eighteenth month of her marriage Queen Katherine Howard, the fifth wife of Henry VIII. and the second Queen whom he had sent to the block after repudiating a lawful wife to obtain her hand."

" The beauteous toy so fiercely sought
Had lost its charm by being caught."

* * * * *

Master Leyland appeared somewhat " fishified " by this irruption of royalties on the banks of Ouse and I found that he had lost interest in the Seaburgh of Willington or the " dukkes pondes " as he would call it; that he must away to the " sumptuous new house " to scrape acquaintance with gentlemen of His Grace's suite and learn what was toward in the affairs of state. He promised to include the information I had given him as to Willington in his work of " laboriouser serche " and he would hope to see me again and learn further of those same Danes, and so we parted with expressions of high esteem and " he stood not on the manner of his going."

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C.B. and I felt somewhat flat and jaded after our three days incursion into the region of ancient days beside the Ouse. Like Councillor Knapp of Copenhagen, we felt that after all we were best in our own prosaic, unlovely, commonplace 1920 again. As La Rochefoucauld moralises " we sometimes condemn the present, by praising the past, and show our contempt of what now is, by our esteem for what is no more." After our experience of " what is no more " we decide to jettison the " Goloshes of Fortune." Accordingly we put a stone in the toes and cast them into the Ouse and watch them wobble slowly downwards, nuzzled by a curious perch. " Have a care, little perch, of those same goloshes. You may find yourself back in some prehistoric age when finny monsters threshed upwards along the Ouse, who, despite your prickly fins, will make short work of you and of your kind."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ATTACK OF THE DANES ON BEDFORD IN 921.

"The Seaking woke from the troubled sleep
Of a vision haunted night
And he looked from his bark o'er the gloomy deep
And counted the streaks of light.
For the red sun's earliest ray
Was to rouse his bands that day
To the stormy joys of fight."

—HEMANS.

ONE thousand and fifty years ago the Ouse played a part in English history which offers strange contrast to its present lonely, neglected waterway. Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, for a while defeated by the all-conquering Danes, emerged from his refuge in the isle of Athelney, mustered his thegns, and routed the Danish Jarl, Guthrum, at the Battle of Ethandune, A.D. 878. Alfred, with far-sighted statesmanship, knew that the Danes were no longer just seafaring pirates; that they had settled in England, in many places, coalescing peacefully with the Saxons, and that some day there must be a fusion of the two races. So he contented himself with demanding that Guthrum should accept Christian Baptism, and with defining clearly the boundary lines of the Kingdom of Wessex and the Danelagh. By the Frith or Peace of Wedmore, the frontier was fixed: "Let the bounds of our dominion stretch to the River Thames, and from thence to the water of Lea, even unto the head of the same water, and thence straight unto Bedeford, and finally along by the river Ouse let them end at Watling Street."

Hence the course of the Ouse from Stony Stratford to Bedford, our third, fourth, and fifth day's canoe voyage, became the northern frontier of Wessex. The Lea and a line drawn from the source of the Lea, north of Luton and Leagrave, to Bedford, constituted its eastern frontier, while the Watling Street, running from Stony Stratford *via* Dunstable to London, was its western limit. Hence Bedford lay at the extreme north-east apex of this territory, and built entirely on the northern bank of the Ouse, having no southern suburb of Mikesgate, it constituted an important frontier outpost of the Danelagh, which comprised all the east side of England from the Tweed to the Thames.

A period of comparative peace occupied the close of Alfred's reign, marked by the beneficent civilizing work which has gained for him in English history the title of "the Great." His son, Edward the Elder, was less contented to let things be, and aimed at absorbing the whole of Mercia, and subjugating the Northumbrian and East Anglian Danes. Along a line stretching from the mouth of the Thames through Bedfordshire to Chester, which separated the hostile nations, he and his valiant sister Ethelflaed constructed a series of fortresses, and assumed the offensive, pushing north and east. In 915 the Danish Jarl, Thurketyl, with his garrison and the chief townsmen of Bedford, made submission to Edward the Elder. We have come upon the trail of Edward's campaigns at Buckingham, which he fortified in 919, and again at

Passenham on the Ouse, near Stony Stratford, his objective being to keep the Danes from penetrating up the river. Almost all the burghs built by him not only guarded waterways, but were fortified on each bank. The Saxon Chronicle, writing of the year 919, runs: "This year came King Edward with his army to Bedanford before Matin Mass and received that city in surrender and to him returned nearly all the Burgesses who had before obeyed him, and having stayed there four weeks he ordered a fortification to be erected on the south side of the river before he departed thence." This fortification enclosed a considerable area as a *tête de gué*, and is still clearly defined by the King's Ditch (see Appendix VIII.), otherwise the site of Mikesgate, or "over the Bridge." The Danes of the Danelagh, dispirited by Edward's continued successes, made four last expeditions. One party occupied Tempsford and attacked Bedford, another stormed the walls of Towcester, a third attacked Wigmore, and a fourth surrounded Malden. In the last three expeditions the garrisons appear to have defended themselves until relieved by the royal army, but to the credit of the men of Bedford they beat back the attack unaided. Before his death in 925 Edward had received the submission of the tribes from the Channel to Northumbria, and could claim to be the first King of the Anglo-Saxons.

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The summer of 1921 will be the thousandth anniversary of this expedition of the Danes *viâ* the Ouse. Mr. Goddard, who has done so much to investigate the seaburgh of Willington, described in the last chapter, writes: "In 920 the Danes of East Anglia and Huntingdon, mustering at their stronghold in the latter place, set off up the Ouse in the hope, as the Chronicle tells us, that by battle and war they might get more of the land again. We next hear of them at Tempsford, the Tameseford of Domesday, where 'they wrought a work,' and thoroughly settled themselves in their new headquarters in place of Huntingdon. . . . At this place there is a very strong little encampment, one of the few held by all our earthwork authorities to be undoubtedly of Danish origin. It is planted down near the junction of the Ivel and the Ouse, and is oblong in shape, 120 feet by 84 feet, with great ramparts and ditches, and a small mound commanding the entrance towards the Ivel." This earthwork, between the Ouse and Ivel at Tempsford, is called locally "Cannocks Castle."

Oman, in his "Art of War," thus defines Danish strategy in their expeditions: "Their base of operations was, of course, their fleet, and such expeditions always ended in a swift return to their boats. As a rule, their method was to work up some great stream. . . . When they got to the point where it was no longer navigable, or where a fortified city stretching across both banks made further progress impossible, they would moor their ships or draw them ashore. They would then protect them with a stockade, leave part of their force as a garrison to guard it, and undertake circular raids with the rest. On the approach of a superior force they were accustomed in their earlier days to hurry back to their vessels, drop down stream, and escape to sea."

To realise the scene enacted on the banks of the Ouse from Tempsford to Bedford a thousand years ago, one must pause here at Willington, and give the imagination rein to see again the local surroundings in the year 921. Picture the Ouse, not as now, a peaceful, sluggish stream, but a wide, lagoon-like river, some two to three hundred yards wide, in permanent flood, as we see it from time to time in winter season now-a-days, covering the alluvial deposit lands as marked in the map of the Ouse valley? Its upland water, finding difficult outlet to the sea when it reached

the vast marshes of the Fen, was backed up far inland, while the dense forests which covered these midland counties, would attract a far heavier rainfall than at present. From Bedford far up to distant Stony Stratford, some seventy miles, the Ouse—the dividing line between Saxon and Dane—was a frontier across which they mutually raided and burnt homesteads and glowered at each other, like Pathan and Afghan across the Indian Frontier. Bedford, the main frontier station of the Danelagh, had just made submission to Edward the Elder, as stated earlier, and the poor hinds of riverside hamlets cowered in fear, knowing not who was master, in dread alike of Saxon and Northern armies. Not fifty years before, Danish Vikings had sacked and burnt the great Abbey of Ely, slaughtering its monks on the altar step, and leaving no living soul on the isle of Ely. Crowland and Peterborough had suffered the same grim fate, at the hands of these fierce sons of Odin and Thor. In Christian Churches of East Anglia—in the two Saxon Churches of Bedford, St. Peter's and St. Cuthbert's—daily supplication and prayer went up “From the fury of the Northmen good Lord deliver us.” News reached the Bedford burgesses in 919 that the Northmen eastwards were again taking the war trail westwards, and that their war “ceols” had rowed up from Huntingdon, and lay anchored in the stream off Tempsford—where now the great North Road crosses the Ouse—and that a great stockaded earthwork was going busily forward. From time to time scouts would be sent out, who would crouch in the woods above the river, and count the war-ships, and bring back tidings of all they saw; while messengers went westward to the King in his castle, with its “sconces and rampires,” astride the Ouse at Buckingham. And then one day the great King Edward the Elder, Alfred's son, rides into Bedford, and from the wooden stockaded castle mound looks over the Ouse, and notes that the southern bank lies flat and open to attack. So on the morrow he crosses the river, marks a great half circle, and summons the burgesses to dig and entrench and stockade the King's Ditch, and for a month he stays and sees the work well in hand; while the royal command is sent to all the “theygns” in the neighbourhood to see spears and swords sharpened, and bows and slings refitted, and to be ready to muster at the ford of Bedford at the King's summons. Winter was a period of respite, but one evening of the spring 921, the scouts bring back ominous news. They had lain all the night before in the woods, and had seen the glare and smoke of burning homesteads eastward, and terrified fugitives hurrying westward, telling that the Northmen were coming up the river in some thirty war vessels. The time was come, and the summons went out to the theygns and from neighbouring villages theygns and carls marched to the mustering place, and for many days they dug and delved and made earthworks across the fields north of the Ouse, east of the town, cutting away bush and tree that the enemy might find no shelter.

* * * * *

At last the invading fleet rowed westward again from Tempsford. The discovery of what is known as the “Gokstadt ship,” found in south Norway in the barrow of some chieftain in 1880, illustrates the ship of the period. This Viking ship, clincher built in eight strakes, or overlapping planks, caulked with hair, and iron fastened, was 66 feet long on the keel and 78 over all, with $15\frac{1}{2}$ feet extreme breadth, stem and stern shaped alike with steep sheer or rise at both ends. Such ships ranged from 50 to 150 feet, one belonging to Canute reaching 300 feet. They had from twelve to thirty-five “rooms” or seats for the rowers, the larger vessels being decked with cabins below and a raised poop

aft. They were painted white, blue, red or party coloured and the shields of the warriors hung round the gunwhales, to serve as protection. A paddle in the stern served as rudder, while a single mast supported a square sail. The lofty carved figure head, a dragon, a serpent, horse, wolf, bird, etc., gave names to the vessels—"Serpent," "Wolf," "Seaking," "Deer," "Horse of the Sea," "Sea Stag," and many another name. The smaller vessels are computed to have held some 80 to 100 men.

The Saxon watchers sighted the fleet coming up the Ouse floodway until the measured rattle of the oars in the rullocks grew plain. The Danes had chosen their anchorage, Willington, and there they landed. For many days there was digging and trenching for a seaburgh, while another party worked at a circular stockade on the hillside, north of the river. Their spies would bring back word that the Saxons were now astride the river at Bedford and a great new stockade closed all approach by the south bank. One can picture how when all was ready the last gathering of the Jarls, the "*Thing*," mustered. Rank by rank on the grass sat the carls and thralls in polished metal helmets, with protections for nose and cheeks, surmounted with wings or as often, with the image of a boar, clad in "byrnies" or battle shirts of close ringed mail reaching almost to the knee. Beside them lay spear and battle axe, hiltless broadsword and dagger, with bull's hide shields studded with nails. Here and there one was armed with sling or bow and arrow, but it was still the day of hand to hand fight and the bowman had not yet come to his own. Probably the gathering numbered the crews of some thirty sea craft, the "skiphære" or ship host, carrying some three thousand men. In the centre, surrounded by his leaders, the chief Jarl would bespeak his host, giving the brief orders for the morrow's battle, and then to banish shades of the "Valkyries"—the corse choosing sisters bidden of Odin to single out warriors to die on the morrow and win Valhalla—an aged "skald" stood forth and tuned his lyre and sang a saga of old time, of Grettir the Strong, while the yellow haired, bearded warriors thundered applause, the echo of which would travel over the water to the Saxons watching them from the castle mound or behind the King's Ditch. Great barrels of mead would be rolled out and broached and full horns drunk to Odin, the giver of victory, to Thor who gives strength in battle, to Loki god of guile and Freyja goddess of love. So they sat in the gathering twilight and drank their mead and watched while baresark men matched their strength in wrestling or spear throwing. Meanwhile some house carls stake out a circle some twenty feet across and gather hazel twigs and rapidly raise a wattled fence, for a "holm-gang" was to be fought. Bjorn, the house carl, had refused to pay the "weregeld," the penalty for manslaying, having slain in quarrel one Gizar, and so he needs must fight Gizar's brother Thorod. "Baresark" without byrnies, armed with sword, dagger and shield, they laid on within the circle of hazel twigs which neither might touch. Swords flash and play and blows ring on helm and shield, while blood flows from more than one shrewd gash, and the warriors seated round shout approval of each good stroke. But the Jarl cries halt, for he can ill spare a good sword on the morrow and the friends of Bjorn cast money into a helm and the "weregeld" is paid. At last the horns are empty, the wassail over, and save for watchful sentries who exchange fire signals with the garrison on the hill across the river, the warriors sleep, some on the open decks, others on the grass and the hot night wears on.

* * * * *

The early morning mist lies over the river like beds of wool as the camp

stands to arms, and the prows are turned across stream and rowed northwards towards the high northern bank until the water is too shallow and the men drop over the gunwales and wade ashore. Rank after rank they climb the hill and the garrison in the little camp give them cheer and greeting as they pass westward towards Bedford.

* * * * * * *

If a modern battle beggars the pen which would tell its story, much more so those grim hand to hand struggles of ancient days, where the ranks once broken, the battle became a series of individual hand to hand duels. Probably the Saxon use of mounted spearmen and of bowmen decided the day. The Saxon thegns, mounted on great heavy horses, would charge deep into the ranks of the Danes, fighting with the spear or battleaxe, and behind them surge into the gaps axemen and swordsmen on foot. Axe and sword rise and fall amid the shouts of the fighters and the groan and cough of the fallen, while overhead hover waiting for their prey clouds of kites and buzzards; for—

“ The kite knows well the long stern swell
That bids the legions close.”

Backwards and forwards the battle surges, the broken ranks interlocked, but the Saxons are fighting for something more than plunder, for wives and children waiting trembling behind them to learn the fate of the day. And it comes soon. The left wing of the Danes is cut off from the main body and driven headlong into the marshy shallows where now stand the ruins of Newnham, and thence they are forced back into the river and beaten down by axe and sword or drowned in the weight of their armour. The Saxons close into a compact phalanx and charge rank after rank into the remaining body of the Danish army, which yields beneath the impact, and suddenly there begins the panic which will seize fighting masses, as though one mind pervaded the whole, and it becomes a rout—the Danes now in full flight to reach their “skiphære.” They make a last stand at the ford of a stream in the dip of the road near Howbury, at the spot still called “Bloody Battle Bridge.” But they are hacked down in the water and the Saxon victors sweep on in pursuit, surge over the little stockaded camp on the Renhold Hill which Leyland calls the castle of Adingreaves, and butcher the garrison. A last grim struggle, men battling waist deep in the water, contests the possession of the waiting ships. Meanwhile in the rear the townspeople flock out to slay the wounded and to drive off the kites and strip the dead; while the Mikesgate garrison hurry along the southern bank to cut off the Danes from the seaburgh at Willington. Probably but few of the vessels were re-manned and got safely away, rowing in haste down stream, in too great a hurry to heed the cries of the little garrison in the seaburgh, which soon meets its fate from the Mikesgate force. The Saxons return triumphant, to bury their dead where they fell, with Christian rite, their feet to the east, sword and spear beside them, as they have been found in modern times. They must have gathered the bodies of the Danish slain and buried them pell mell, as heathen, in a great pit, and covered them over with the mound of Risinghoe, as is credibly supposed. Mr. Goddard, writing of the mound says “It has now at any rate much more the appearance of a barrow and even the name suggests that it may have been the *hangr* of Hrisingr, perhaps one of the Danish leaders slain in the fight.”

A few weeks later a strong English force attacked the Danish base at Tempsford, wiped out the garrison and destroyed their station, where fell, as

the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says, "the King of the Pagans and Earl Toglos and Earl Mannan his son, and his brother and all who were within."

Great must have been the rejoicing as the victors returned to the town. I conjecture the men of Bedford for many a generation after kept Hok Tide holiday to commemorate the defeat of the Danes, as I have pictured in Chapter XX. The "tuttimen" perhaps derived their name from "tutela"—the protection the town had found behind the shields of the sturdy theygns and their followers. As once the women folk flocked out from the bailliwick and kissed the proud fighters on their return, while the "C.3." men of that day disbursed their money for stoups of honey mead wherein to pledge the victors and to hold high wassail, so the "tuttimen" of later days collected kisses and pennies at Hok Tide. For many a generation the festival found yearly place until men grew slothful beneath the spell of peace and prosperity and no longer practised the use of sling and bow, broadsword and spear, deeming them archaic and useless implements and forgot the valiant deeds of their forefathers.

But a thousand years rolled by, and once more the call came to face the "baresark" fury of modern Northmen, and the shores of East Anglia once again saw the dark hulls of the foe loom out of the North Sea. But the spirit of our Saxon forefathers had but slept within us, it had never died, and once more the men of Bedfordshire poured forth to fight for that far cast Empire of which the Wessex of Alfred and Edward the Elder was the foundation stone—its frontier no longer the puny rivers of Ouse and Lea, but the oceans which wash every shore of earth. And so in 1921 Bedford, we hope, will again honour the valiant "tuttimen" of the town who fell in battle in ancient and modern days, and thank God anew that the old supplicatory prayer of our distant forefathers was again answered and deliverance vouchsafed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILLINGTON TO HUNTINGDON.

"A rushy island guards the sacred bower
And hides it from the meadow, where in peace
The lazy cows wrench many a scented flower
Robbing the golden market of the bees :
And laden barges float
By meads of myosote,
And scented flag and golden flower de lys
Delay the loitering boat."

—ROBERT BRIDGES.

I HAVE sewed a sorry patch of fact and fustian fiction over the all too threadbare subject of the Ouse at Bedford. There remains to continue the voyage on that portion of the river which now becomes one of the *Fluvieæ Regales* or "*Haut streames de la Roy*," because various Acts of Parliament have declared it a navigable river from Bedford downwards, and its passage free to all comers. This is the period of Ouse's middle age. The meandrous vagaries, the sinuosities and eccentricities of youth are laid aside, and the Ouse seems to settle down resignedly to that beaten track of routine which sooner or later our feet tread more and more consistently, albeit reluctantly, when youth is over; and from Bedford the Ouse flows steadily on north-east with almost undeviating purpose towards his final bourne. At one time a fair number of adventurous Bedfordians were wont to take boat at least to St. Ives. Even a crew of Aldermen and City Fathers once voyaged down majestically in a steamer some years ago, to be feted civically at various points and to colloque with other City Fathers as to floating once more the argosies of commerce upon this "*haut streame de la Roy*," but the voyage was in vain. Of late years, since the locks have fallen into disrepair, few have fared that way, and have usually brought back exaggerated reports of impossible portrages and obstacles. I can say from recent experience that no such insuperable difficulties exist at the sixteen locks to be surmounted, where portrages are easy for moderate sized boats. The Ouse Drainage Act will no doubt make the voyage in the future easy for all, and possibly introduce steamer excursions as far St. Ives.

Hence, I resume my voyage on August 28th, 1920, that I may see the river in autumn time, mark how the public avails itself of the charm of Ouse in holiday season, and reach the Fen when the Fen is to be seen at its best, trusting that a few bald guide book directions may encourage others to voyage this portion of the Ouse, so easily accessible to them. The distances in miles and furlongs from Bedford are quoted from "Bradshaw's Navigable Rivers."

My former crew have departed to moor or yellow sands, so I press à crew of two stalwart "Elstonians," my former pupils. There is surely no calling in life which yields such a rich aftermath as that of a Headmaster. Nor age, nor custom stales that time-honoured loyalty which hallows the old tie of master and boy. It is one of the best traditions of English schoolboy life

that to him his old Headmaster, despite years, absence and personal shortcomings, is a person sacrosanct; to be tended on hand and foot, to be ceremoniously "sir"red on all occasions, and to be to him at least "not as other men are." He who fails to receive that homage has missed his vocation and therewith much in life. And so I find myself on one of the rare fine days of this August, installed in state in the bows of the canoe, propelled onwards from Willington by two pairs of stalwart arms, to be bidden constantly "to put that paddle down," and as for portorage, the gods forbid I should demean myself by such menial service—a voyage de luxe. A portorage over the Long Mills Lock (6 miles 5 furlongs), which some years back was the only lock in use, as Mr. Simpson, the owner of the Navigation Rights, used to reside at the Lock House in summer, and we come to the long stone bridge of Great Barford (7 miles 2 furlongs).

The mediæval builder of it must have been somewhat an eccentric, for he chose to vary the shape of every one of its seventeen arches.

"Here," says Leyland, "on ulter ripe of Ouse is a good Uplandishe Towne." One fails to recognise either its uplandishness, for it lies very low, or its townishness, for it is but a village, and yet it would seem from ancient records of the Bedford Corporation that Barford and its bridge threatened serious commercial rivalry.

In the reign of Henry VI., when the charter of Bedford was confirmed, the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses appealed for the reduction of the fee-farm rent, £45 a year, payable to the Crown, and it was reduced by Henry VI. to a fee-farm rent of £22. One of the reasons put forward by the Burgesses ran as follows:—

"That a new bridge, namely Barford, had been erected at a neighbouring town, across the water of the Ouse, and this bridge had become so great a thoroughfare to the other market towns of the county, for people who formerly came to Bedford, that the strays and chattels, tolls and customs, which were due there to the Mayor and Commonalty, had been almost entirely lost, and the greater part of the men inhabiting the town were ready to abandon it, unless some remedy were provided by the King."

I think the Burgesses of Bedford must have seized upon a specious argument to magnify their financial straits, for despite that it was a point of navigation, I cannot find that Barford ever "arrived." I have given in Appendix IV. the State docket on the Ouse navigation, of James II.'s treacherous Secretary of State, the Earl of Sunderland, wherein he notes down, somewhat cryptically: "The question is not whether the river should be made navigable, for that is already done to Tempsford and Barford, nor whether Navigation be good or ill for a country, for by experience we find it good, grayne being dearer at St. Neots than at Bedford by reason of it. But the sole question is whether Barford, a sorry village that hath but a poor fund of two beds or Bedford the Shire Towne shall be the Seate of trade." A cheery little inn, the "Ship," overlooks the river, telling of ancient barge traffic and thirsty barges, but there is no sign of stir save that here the rush trade appears to flourish, for we pass various men waist-deep mowing the rushes, while women sort them into shocks of long and short rushes. The former, I am told, are used in cooperage, for caulking the seams of barrels, while the shorter rushes serve for baskets and matting. By the way, this is the worst portorage on the whole river, as there is a deep drop below the lock, and someone has erected a barbed wire fence along the lock side. But we are soon afloat again.

The Ouse is noted among rivers for its flora, and the banks are aflame with wild flowers. Though the lily season is over there is a riot of river bank blooms. The reed beds have taken on their beautiful feathery sprays of blue bronze hue; the banks are bright with red sorrel, purple loosestrife, and masses of the *epilobium hirsutum*, called codlings and cream, cherry pie, and various names, while wide beds of the beautiful pink blossoms of the water dock (*polygonum amphibium*) and of forget-me-nots, prank the stream; in short, the banks are bedded out gorgeously. The old tow path has been usurped by the bordering hedges of hawthorn, long untrimmed, and now brilliant with thick clusters of red berries. Hawthorn hedges, alternating with reed and osier beds, give the impression of a water riding through a riverine forest, across which scutter innumerable moorhens, while the thistledown drifts like a gentle fleecy snowfall before the wind. The river sweeps round under the high escarpment of Roxton on our left, and we come to the locks and flood gates of Tempsford, through one of which we manage to edge the canoe into a wide, shallow lagoon, which receives the chief Ouse tributary the Ivel, which once carried a thriving barge traffic to Biggleswade.

It is a spot which Constable would have loved to paint, with its shady trees, still pools, and weed-clad shallows. He would doubtless have reversed to the river the front of a charming old inn, the "Anchor," which faces the Great North Road close by, and once offered its back door to the thirsty barges.

I have talked of Tempsford, Cannock's Castle, and the Danes. Tempsford is called in the Saxon Chronicle the "Burg of Tama." Hence, not unnaturally, Thame, in Oxfordshire, appropriated and incorporated in its local history this Danish episode of "The King of the Pagans, and Earl Toglos and Earl Mannan, his son and his brother, and all who were therein." A learned article in the *South Oxfordshire News*, disproved the claims of Thame, and established the indefeasible rights of Tempsford, though whether Thame in consequence renounced its usurped fame, I know not. Domesday Book alludes to it as "Tamiseford," and Dr. John Morris, in "Local Antiquities," states that "Temps is the Danish variant of Thames as the old name of the Ivel." Allcroft, "British Earthworks," considers it the old name of the Ouse hereabouts, both following Skeat's "Place Names of Bedfordshire." I respectfully decline to believe that the Ouse or the Ivel were ever called Thames at this spot. The root "tam," according to G. Dyer, is Celtic for river, the root "isa" or "issa" which is cognate with Ouse, meaning water. Hence I conceive that at some remote epoch this spot was spoken of by the natives as "tam-ise-ford," the river water ford, not as a proper name, but descriptively (as was originally the case with Waterford and other such names), and eventually it evolved into a proper name as Tamiseford. In Brayley's map of Bedford, 1807, the site of the present Embankment at Bedford is marked as Thames Street, a descriptive name I conjecture, originating similarly in the earliest ford of the river at that spot, as described in my chapter on Bedford Bridge. But there, a mere canoeist should avoid these vain disputations, and no doubt my theory will be ruled out of court as ridiculous.

Just beyond Tempsford the Old North Road crosses the Ouse by a stone bridge built in 1820, where pass innumerable motors, successors of some fifty coaches once passing this way daily, whose ribbons were handled by the Sam Wellers of the old coaching days.

Little Barford is somewhere close at hand, but out of sight, which once

produced a Poet Laureate of the seventeenth century, who might have devoted a sonnet to his native Ouse and did not—Nicholas Rowe.

A long broad stretch of river, with gentle windings, yielding a fresh vista every few hundred yards, brings us to Eaton Socon (13 miles 7 furlongs), where are to be seen a charming mill house and garden. Below the lock and mill tail on the left bank are what Leyland calls the "Vestigia Castelli between the Church and the Ripe, and almost hard on the Ripe," the great earthworks where once stood, guardian of the river, the fortress of Dane or Saxon. Below the mill the view opens up the stately church tower of St. Neots, a tower rivaling that of Magdalen College, Oxford, and the church tower of the neighbouring Eynesbury. Whether this little town (15 miles) should be called Saint Neots (in two syllables) or "Sneets" or "Snotes," no man, even of its citizens, knoweth to this day, and it answers cheerfully to them all. If one proposes to land, there is a very beautiful Church to see, a phenomenally large market place to sun oneself in, and a good inn to refresh at, also "hard on the Ripe." I find it inadvisable as a rule to mention the names of inns in print. To speak of an inn in approbation is to expose oneself to a sinister suspicion of courting a commission, while to disapprove may lead to a writ of libel.

Riverwards, St. Neots has scarcely grouped itself picturesquely on the banks, despite a comely stone bridge of no great antiquity. Here, in 1647, a Royalist party, under George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham,* contested the passage of a Parliamentary force advancing from Eaton Socon, and were driven back into the market place and badly defeated, among the fallen being Colonel Digby, grandson of Sir Everard Digby, of Gayhurst. Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, was among the prisoners, and was executed some months later. St. Neots makes the best of its river, runs some half-dozen houseboats and a Houseboat Club, and to judge by beflanneled youths and be-jumpered maidens therein "Snotes" has established itself as a miniature river side resort, while on this fine day its young folk seem amphibious. To prospective voyagers on the Ouse "Sneets" is a good first day's halting place. The river is not like a road replete with hostelries, and it is well to remember the possible places of call, viz., Buckden (20 miles 6 furlongs) lying a short way back from the Ouse behind Offord Mill; Huntingdon (25 miles 1 furlong), St. Ives (30 miles 6 furlongs), and then no possible place of bed and board until Ely, 22 miles from St. Ives, and a very trying 22 miles, wherein to be benighted, as I once was, lacks charm.

As it is, from a seat of luxurious idleness, I bid my patient crew put a cheerful courage on, and press forward to Huntingdon. A huge new paper mill, replacing the old wooden structure burnt down in recent years, comes as rather a disconcerting close of a pleasant mile long reach of river, and here it is necessary at the lock to portage across the road and to beware of motors emerging round a blind corner.

We skirt on our left the well-timbered park of Little Paxton, Great Paxton perching itself on a high ridge away to the right, while the Great Northern Railway runs close along the right bank for some four miles of broad open river to the twin villages of Offord (Old Ford) Darcy and Offord Cluney. There a vast up-to-date modern brick mill has replaced the old wooden mill of my youth, and favoured by a siding on the railway

* Scott, in "Peveril of the Peak," has drawn a graphic sketch of this gay, witty, dissipated courtier of Charles II. Dryden, in "Absalom and Achitopel," savagely lampoons him under the name of Zimri, "this chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon."

flourishes greatly. The portorage is on the left bank just before the mill into the spillway (20 miles 6 furlongs¹)

A short stroll away on the left bank leads to Buckden, where stand the stately ruins of the Palace of the Bishops of Lincoln, and where among many prelates lies buried the redoubtable Bishop Grosstête. They were once great people, those Bishops of Lincoln, ruling a diocese of six counties, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and part of Hertfordshire—1,255 parishes—as recorded by Spede, by far the largest diocese in England. There was lodged poor Katherine of Aragon in 1533, as I have told. Some two and a half miles further on we come to the ancient decaying mill of Brampton, long abandoned to rats and bats, with the village of Brampton just above us on the left bank. Many will connect it merely with the peerage of that redoubtable Judge, Mr. Justice Hawkins, an alumnus of Bedford School, but to lovers of Pepys, it is familiar as the birth-place and home of the inimitable Samuel Pepys: Thither, as the "Diary" records, he paid many visits to mess and meddle with the affairs of his family, to sun himself in the genial rays of his patron, the Earl of Sandwich, at Hinchbrook hard by, and returning to London, to leave behind him the much-tried Mrs. Pepys for a sojourn in the country. Pepys remarks "how convenient it were for me to have Brampton for her to be sent to, when I have a mind or occasion to go abroad to Portsmouth or elsewhere." The "elsewhere" of Pepys was comprehensive and all-embracing, and one would judge Mrs. Pepys had her own views on the convenience of Brampton, and made herself correspondingly unpleasant there, as I have cited in Chapter III.

Here at Brampton Mill I land from my canoe—tread gingerly across its decaying floor, where beneath, the river pours tumultuously through the now empty wheel chamber—wend up by a field road, and there on the outskirts of Brampton I find "Pepys' Farm"—the old home of the family. It still stands—just as you see it in my picture—scarce a brick or tile changed I surmise since Samuel visited it, and this vast tree which shadows it—must have looked down on Father and sister Sarah and brother Thomas, taking "a dish of tea" below, and listening deferentially as Samuel points his discourse with the stem of his Churchwarden. As I pace its garden—it is all alive with the calling of old voices, until I seem wafted into my astral body, and am greeting Samuel, just arrived, 9 October, 1667, to visit his family. And presently "having here laid up our things—up and down to see the garden with my Father and the house, and do altogether find it very pretty—especially the little parlour. . . . Only the walls do want greens upon it, and the house is too low-roofed." Then "with my wife in her velvett vest which is mighty fine" we (I astrally) go up to dine at Hinchbrook with my Lady—my Lord, "being kept in Spain without money and at great expense." We make our best legs and kiss the hands of "my ladies Pauline and Ann, who are both grown very proper ladies and handsome enough." I regret that the Lady Jemimah is not present. We dine "where we had a good plain Country dinner." And after dinner we sat in a garden arbour "and anon the two twins† were sent for from School at Mr. Taylor's to come to see me, and I took them in the garden . . . and I did examine them and do find them so well advanced in their learning that I am amazed at it—they repeating a whole ode of Horace without book." Astrally I found

† Oliver Montague, M.P. for Huntingdon, Solicitor-General to the Queen, 1685. John Montague, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Dean of Durham.

Samuel professing more Latinity than he possessed—looking severe, but offering no “prompt” when the Honourable John stumbles over

Heu quoties fidem

Mutatosque deos

though he moralised very sagely upon the Horatian theme, whereof his experience was profound.

And so back in the cool of the evening over the Nun’s Bridge, “and so home, and supped and full of good country talk,” father and Sarah and Thomas no doubt deferentially attentive to Samuel, but Mrs. Pepys very high and sniffy with Sarah. For after supper “my father tells me that he is troubled that my wife shows my sister no countenance, and him but very little . . . and I do observe she carry herself very high. . . . And so all to bed: my wife and I in the high bed in our Chamber and Willett in the trundle bed—by us.” The Chamber was I feel sure yonder room at the east end of the house, with two side windows looking over to the Nun’s Bridge and the chimneys of Hinchinbrook. Samuel comes down next morning “with great pains of the collique—by cold taken yesterday I believe with going up and down in my shirt . . . and to walk up and down in the garden with my father, to talk of all our concerns; about a husband for my sister whereof there is at present no appearance, but we must endeavour to find her one, for she grows old and ugly; and then for my brother”—etc. And there is Mrs. Pepys at the window putting on “a new lace whisk” and scolding Willett, and Sarah is nagging at Thomas in the “little parlour.” But Samuel philosophically smokes his long clay pipe under the great tree—“having no mind to enquire the reason—for vexing myself—being desirous to pass my time with as much mirth as I can while I am abroad.” How homey and familiar sound these voices that call in the garden across the gulf of two hundred and fifty years! But the main object of Pepys’ visit this 9 Oct., 1667 is as follows.

* * * * *

When the Dutch Fleet threatened the Thames in 1667 Pepys, in alarm, drew £1,300 in gold from his bankers, and sent his father and Mrs. Pepys by coach to Brampton with it, in company with the Clerk Gibson, with instructions to bury it in the garden. The said Gibson, by the way, “had one of his bags broke through his breeches, and some pieces dropped out,” which he could not find, or said he could not, and Samuel makes the best of it, resolved “not to afflict myself for it.” The panic over, on the 9th October, 1667, he journeys down to Brampton. I picture him riding over Huntingdon Bridge, not, I wean, without “nods and becks and wreathed smiles” at the damsels of Huntingdon, as was his wont. Under cover of night he starts with his father and Mrs. Pepys to disinter the buried treasure. “But Lord! what a tosse I was in for some time—in that they could not justly tell where it was.” One is not surprised at his being in “a tosse!” Such a digging and delving and grubbing and sifting as never was, and then some twenty or thirty sovereigns short, which causes him to moralise, “how painful it is sometimes to keep money as well as to get it.” The return journey to London by coach was an anxious time. “My gold I put in a basket and set under one of the seats, and so my work every quarter of an hour was to look to see if all was well, and I did ride in great fear all day.” However, “gentlemen of the road” missed their occasion, and all went well, for next day “by five o’clock I got home . . . and did bring my

gold to my heart's content, very safe home, having not this day carried it in a basket but in our hands . . . I being afraid of the bottom of the coach, lest it should break through."

I cast a last look round the garden of "Pepys' Farm." Would I possessed some fairy's divining rod—to locate those thirty lost sovereigns, but no doubt Mr. Page, who keeps a dairy there, has probed all likely places. So Samuel walks down to see me off at Brampton Mill, and is in a great "tosse" to find this once busy centre of Brampton's life—a hoary ruin tottering over the Ouse, and the mill wheel which rumbled in Plantagenet days—gone, and he moralises much over the mutability of human "concernments."

CHAPTER XXV.

HUNTINGDON BY THE OUSE.

" Sometimes an angler comes and drops his hook
Within its hidden depths and 'gainst a tree
Leaning his rod, reads in some pleasant book,
Forgetting soon his pride of fishery;
And dreams or falls asleep,
While curious fishes peep
About his nibbled bait, or scornfully
Dart off and rise and leap."

—ROBERT BRIDGES.

JUST past Brampton Mill we sight the spires of Huntingdon, across the vast level stretch of the Port Holme meadow of 360 acres, said to be the largest meadow in England, once a racecourse, and during the war an aerodrome, and what not. "Exceeding large," writes Camden, "and a more glorious one the sun never saw, to which in spring time this verse may be well applied:—

"Ver pingit vario gemmantia prata colore."

These old itinerists are very unemotional, and seldom have an eye for the picturesque or the beautiful, but for once, even Camden appreciates the charm of the river approach to Huntingdon: "This pleasant scene, as if contrived on purpose by some painter, perfectly charms one's eye." Though it may lack the primitive solitude and charm of the upper reaches of Tyringham, the Ouse hereabouts from Brampton Mill to St. Ives, follows a very beautiful course, as it slides by the greenest of meadows, by riverside churches, and beneath bridges of hoar antiquity, picturesque cottages and ancient villages, checking awhile at mediæval mills, primitive locks, and shallow fords. I. J. Hissey, in "Over Fen and Wold," thus writes of it: "Our verdict, given after our enjoyable ramble, is that the Ouse from Huntingdon to St. Ives is a most picturesque and paintable stream, and simply abounding in picture-making material. Quite as good "stuff" (to use artists' slang) may be found on the Ouse as on the Thames, with the added charm of freshness, for the beauties of the Thames have been so painted and photographed that they are familiar to all." I have quoted in Appendix VII. the opinions of Hilaire Belloc and George Gissing.

I have alluded to the Fraser family, three brothers of great artistic ability, who spent a sort of gipsy artist existence hereabouts on the Ouse some forty years ago, and painted many charming pictures of this portion of the river. The pot needed "hotting up" too often, and their work was uneven, but the best was true art and worth buying when their pictures come rarely on to the local market. I do not know what became of them, save one, whose body was found hereabouts when the ice melted after a long frost, having presumably met his fate in a solitary skate on the deep reaches of the Ouse in 1895.

The river skirts round the Port Holme and runs on to Godmanchester, a tiny but still corporate town of some 2,000 inhabitants, connected by a long causeway with its close neighbour, Huntingdon, itself the smallest county

town in England, save Appleby. We pass the lock-gates on our left, and skirt a wide lagoon, faced with Dutch-looking houses on a quay, and the tiny Town Hall of Godmanchester. We wind round to the left past charming little riverside gardens of the humbler sort, where ahead another hoary timbered ruin poises itself athwart the mill race, Godmanchester Mill, and you find yourself in an enchanted backwater, spanned by a fairy bridge where smooth lawns and shady trees and sylvan arbours fringe the stream, and a shallop floats beside each "privie staire." These happy people inhabit R. L. Stevenson's ideal home:

"A house with lawns enclosing it,
A living river by the door;
A nightingale in the sycamore."

Maidens drowsing in hammocks turn slumberous eyes upon us as we glide by, and matrons stay their knitting needles to direct from over their spectacles a gorgon stare upon our passing.

Here it is ever Sunday afternoon:

"Where sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half dream."

Huntingdon from end to end reposes in a Sabbatic calm, genial and cosy, a spot as the old hymn quaintly pictures Heaven:

"Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths never end."

The canoe emerges from this Ouse Arcady, where two streams diverge, the one turning to the right under Godmanchester Causeway to join the river below Huntingdon, the other, the proper route, to the left, and so past the Port meadow to the Bridge of Huntingdon. Only once in its age-long siesta was this charming little county town thoroughly awakened up, with eyes agog upon a wonderful sight, on a certain April 27th, 1603. It fell out in this wise. Yonder, half a mile away on our left, lies Hinchingsbrook, once the seat of the Cromwells, now owned by the Montague family, the Earls of Sandwich, among whom, by the way, the Earl of George III.'s reign bulked large in the public eye as "Jemmy Twitcher," but that is another story. Carlyle writes of it: "A stately, pleasant house among the shady lawns and expanses on the left bank of the Ouse—a short half-mile west of Huntingdon; still stands pretty much as Oliver Cromwell's grandfather left it; rather kept good and defended from the inroads of time and accident, than substantially altered." There at Hinchingsbrook, on that spring day of 1603, arrived with a vast cavalcade, James VI. of Scotland and I. of England, progressing by slow stages from Edinburgh to Whitehall, to sit on the throne of the dead Elizabeth, stopping for two days to be entertained right royally by Sir Oliver Cromwell: "Morry, mon, thou hast treated me better than anyone since I left Edinburgh."

Hinchingsbrook and Huntingdon were *en fête*, and held high gala that day. Carlyle, in "Historic Sketches," gives a very graphic account of "James at Hinchingsbrook":—

"And now you are at the hilltop over Godmanchester, and see the flat country broken henceforth into undulations; see the River Ouse with large curvature come sweeping by; on this side of it the low, long street of Godmanchester . . . on the other side leant up, as in comfortable rest, the long

shire town of Huntingdon, with Church towers, spires, and the living smoke of hearths. . . . Mr. Robert Cromwell's chimneys from the west end of the place contribute their quota. . . . An ancient bridge connects the village and the town; the Ouse takes such a sweep as indicates that he is in no haste about his journey, in fact, this poor river has a sad fate to look for: fifty miles of Fen between him and the German Ocean, and such a bewildered race to run as few rivers have. Now branched into various arms; now stagnating in marshy meres, black reedy splashes; now high in air held up by main force in Bedford levels and embankments; if you left him alone he would drown whole districts and leave nothing but the 'isles'—the Isle of Ely and others; this is the fate of the river Ouse, which here flows by unconscious and of a common drab colour. Huntingdon itself leans up against the edge of the hill secure from swamps and mud, and other knolls and faint ridges, ever bluer, ever dimmer, die away towards St. Neots and the Infinite in a pleasant manner."

Carlyle has much to say of this great day in Huntingdon of "the ambrosial sumptuosities of the feasts," of how "the outer fountains of Hinchingsbrook run mere win," and how "no meanest rascal this day goes away unfed," for "one of the heavenly bodies is passing here: Hinchingsbrook has become one of the houses of the Zodiac." And then to the point of all this discourse: "Solely, or almost solely, among that fluctuating multitude which floods all Hinchingsbrook in such deray and gala, we will note one little boy of four years old gone Tuesday last;* led by his nursemaid, as is like; and bustling to and fro, with due convenience, to all suitablest points of view, for seeing this solemnity; it is a nephew of Sir Oliver, the landlord; his own name is little Oliver or Noll, poor little fellow! Mr. Robert Cromwell, from his mansion in the west end of Huntingdon, is next brother to the Knight of Hinchingsbrook, and father to the boy. He and Dame Cromwell, who is a Steward from the Stuntney Stewards, and so of kin to his Scotch Majesty, are in the feast itself, but this one little Oliver strolls about, I think, in a state of glad excitation in the hand of his nursemaid the while. Look at him, reader; him thou shalt look at. A broad headed, bony-faced little fellow, with clear grey eyes, stout made for his years; extremely full of wonder at the present . . . doubtless in his best cap and breeches. . . . O! Nollykin, my little man, how this unexpected sunburst of the new Scotch Majesty has transported thy little incipient spiritual faculty, and thou art all wide-eyed wonderment; was the like ever seen or dreamt of? And so whenever henceforth the boy Oliver Cromwell thinks of a King, this shambling, thick-speaking, big-headed, goggled-eyed, extraordinary Scotch individual in gilt velvet with fringing will be the thing meant for him. . . .

"O! nursemaid mine, I think his Majesty's tongue is a thought too big for him. See how he drinks, eating his liquor from the cup and the corners of his mouth leak somewhat."

"Hush, thou naughty Nollykin, hush."

"Now however, on Friday morning, breakfast being fairly over it is time his Majesty were under way. Sir Oliver, now Sir and a Knight, must escort his Majesty to the gate and the little Oliver from some street window or other place of vantage may look his last at the Pageant. The new Majesty is gone." Yes, a very great day in the history of Huntingdon!

I think Carlyle's "James at Hinchingsbrook" is one of his happiest

* He was born on the 25th April, 1599.

conceits, as his "Bog of Lindsey" which I quote later is the most infelicitous. Doubtless the visit was a great event for Sir Oliver Cromwell, but a very expensive one. His father, Sir Henry, the Golden Knight, had been a spendthrift and this royal guest must have still further dipped an already embarrassed estate and years later he is obliged to sell Hinchbrook under deed of sale 20 June, 1627, for £3,000 to the Montagues, who still possess it, and to retire to Romsey in the Fen. Of course the tale that on this occasion the little Oliver punched the head of the little Charles Stuart is a myth. They were babes, the one born on the 25th April, 1599, the other on the 19th November, 1600, and Charles was with his nurse in Edinburgh.

The long causeway we have just passed, connecting Huntingdon with its neighbour Godmanchester, keeps another tradition of the young Oliver. When a school boy he fell off the causeway and was nearly drowned, being saved by a Huntingdon clergyman. Years after, Cromwell, passing through the streets of Huntingdon at the head of his Ironsides, happened to recognise the very clergyman and asked him if he remembered it. "I do well and I wish to God I had let you drown rather than have saved your life to use it to fight against your King." To which Cromwell sternly replied: "It was God's will. You merely acted as His servant to perform His wishes. Be pleased, sir, to remember that." The Ouse very nearly reversed the whole destiny of the British Empire.

This answer to an ill-mannered outburst was very characteristic of Cromwell. It would seem that though on public occasions he would often be of "tempestuous conduct" and make "great clamour," to the individual he could show himself patient and gentle to the limit of forbearance. George Fox in the journal of his "Life, Travels, Sufferings, Christian Experiences and Labours of Love"—and his travels were much about the Ouse, here at Huntingdon and many villages hereabouts—seem to have had a weakness for forcing his way into the presence of the Protector and lecturing him. Fox's account of two interviews with the great Ousite at Whitehall in 1654 and 1656 read like Elijah denouncing Ahab or John Knox scolding Mary, Queen of Scots, but save for one brief outburst of impatience Cromwell bore it with patient resignation. Fox sought one more interview in 1658, at Hampton Court, where he met the once "Lord of the Fen" riding at the head of his Lifeguards. "I saw and felt" (writes Fox) "a waft or apparition of death go forth against him and when I came to him, he looked like a dead man. After I had warned him as I was moved to speak to him, he bid me come to his house. But when I came he was sick . . . and the doctors were not willing I should speak with him. So I passed away and never saw him more."

Fox was not minded to leave Cromwell alone even in death. He must needs find fault with his funeral: "Now there was a great bustle about the effigy of Oliver Cromwell lying in state; men standing and sounding with trumpets over his image after he was dead. At this my spirit was greatly grieved and the Lord I found was highly offended. So I did reprove their wickedness and warn them to repent." Fox was very catholic in his denunciations and his net cast for the wicked gathered in a great haul of sundry and divers persons who must have felt rather astonished to find themselves so immersed in the "toils of unrighteousness."

Yes, Huntingdon, despite it is a little place of some 4,000 people, has the fame of the "greatest Ousite" all its own. Here was he born, breeched, schooled, flogged, caught "fyshes" in the Ouse and nearly drowned therein. St. Ives claims his early manhood, 1631—1636, and the rest is history.

An ancient five arched bridge which has shouldered many a flood, for it was built in 1294, carries the Ermine Street across. "High time a decent bridge for cars was built here," say motorists. Happily such modern conveniences do not enter into the purview of Huntingdonians. I cut short our canoeing day in mid-afternoon and put up at the old Bridge Hotel, for Huntingdon is a restful place and cries halt to the traveller. One feels indisposed to turn down in haste the page of its past and the glamour of it holds awhile. I make exception of my rule as to hotels. If anyone seeks a charming week end retreat, resort to the Bridge Hotel at Huntingdon. Laze after lunch in its delightful Ouse side garden and look over the vast green level of the Port Holme to distant hills and when your nap is over summon a boatman and bid him row you on the Ouse, east or west it matters not which, both ways invite. It is the "Skindles" of the Ouse, only a deal more old-world and restful than the Thames. There are no signs of the once busy water traffic from Lynn. Houseboats and sailing boats and punts are the order of to-day. As far back as the reign of Henry II. a guild of Flemish weavers settled here and traded their goods up and down the river on the Lynn "ketches" and so boats plied until some twenty years ago.

Spede gives a curious item of information on early navigation:—

"To this Shire Towne and benefit of the neighbouring countries, this River was navigable untill the power of Grey, a mynion of the time, stopt that passage and with it all redresse either by Law or Parliament." I love the phrase "a mynion of the time," it is nicely calculated to cover much which our coarser phrasing of to-day fails to express. Who the "mynion" was, when he flourished and how he rose superior to law and Parliament in his obstruction of the Ouse, Spede, who is not strong on dates, knows not. Possibly he was one Sir Richard Grey of the time of Richard I., who built a mill at Hemingford Grey, a little lower down on the Ouse, an ancestor of the Lord Grey de Wilton, who possessed an estate there in the XIV. century.

There have been a good many "mynions of the time" upon the Ouse, with some of whom I waged wordy warfare in my youth. Possibly such "mynions" furnished the youthful Cromwell some practice in dialectics.

I stroll up the narrow street where a plate upon an old red brick Georgian house announces that William Cowper lived there for two years, 1765-1767. Of Huntingdon Cowper wrote in 1765 "I do really think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw." There he came to live after his first attack of melancholia and insanity, abandoning all further idea of a professional career in London. There he met his lifelong friends the Unwins, and there the chance visit of the Rev. John Newton, curate of Olney, to the Unwins, decided his removal to Olney in 1767. Huntingdon appears to have been a livelier place than it looks nowadays. "As to amusements," he writes, "I mean what the world calls such, the place indeed swarms with them and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the gentle inhabitants of Huntingdon." I think they profess a few other pursuits nowadays. Further on stands the church of St. John, where for a small fee I could inspect the baptismal register of Oliver Cromwell, while opposite is the old school buildings where once went little Nollykin—

"A whining schoolboy with his satchell
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school."

I wonder if he met and doffed his cap to a certain dapper little eccle-

siastic riding over the bridge to hold his Archidiaconal Visitation—one Dr. Laud, Archdeacon of Huntingdon. If not, the meeting was but delayed. The Archdeaconry of Huntingdon was the first step in promotion towards the chair of St. Augustine, and the scaffold.

An iconoclastic generation years ago improved away the house of Cromwell's birth while leaving many another crumbling dwelling to survive.

A strange contrast these two Ousites—Cromwell and Cowper—who have lent to Huntingdon its title to fame. I have said elsewhere, the celebrities of the Ouse are not many, but the few were cast in an uncommon mould, even for celebrities. They may have been dour of mood, but their eyes were ever lifted towards the great things of life and they walked among the eternal verities.

A hideous modern frontage masques the quaint mediæval courtyard of the George Inn with galleries and outer stairway. In just such a courtyard the Boots, one Samuel Weller, informed Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Wardle and Mr. Perker, that "There's a pair of Vellingtons, a good deal vorn, and a pair of lady's shoes in Number 5."

And then I ramble along the old causeway of Godmanchester and pause to read a stone slab in the wall, thus inscribed:—

ROBERTUS COOKE

Ex aquis emersus

Hoc viatoribus

D.D. 1637.

A passer-by explains that one Dr. Robert Cooke was washed off the causeway in a high flood and nearly drowned, and in gratitude for his escape bequeathed in his will a fund to be employed on the repair of the causeway and bridge for ever. Somewhere along the causeway once stood the oak tree celebrated by "Drunken Barnabee" who drank and travelled and rhymed in Latin about here in 1635.

*Veni Godmanchester ubi
Ut Ixion captus nube,
Sic, etc.*

Barnabae Itinerarium.

But like Carlyle I failed to get information of it from the passers-by.

Presently in the evening I join the bridge loafers, lean over the parapet and watch a little Nollykin of an urchin ply rod and line below as did a certain other little Nollykin three hundred odd years ago. A merry faced cheeky urchin by my elbow exhorts the fisherman to "jump in and hook 'em on," and I bethink me of just such another merry faced cheeky urchin, circa 1640, one Sammy Pepys of Brampton, also a school-boy of Huntingdon Grammar School. I hope Dr. Beard, who birched "Nollykin,"* still flourished to dust the breeks of Sammy and even if he did his duty thoroughly by Sammy, he still left a deal of the "old Adam" uneradicated.

* Cromwell did not forget his old Headmaster. In his first speech in Parliament, 11 Feb., 1628, of which a fragment is preserved, he said: "He had heard by relation from one Dr. Beard that Dr. Alabaster had preached flat popery at St. Paul's Cross, and that the Bishop of Winchester had commanded him as his Diocesan to preach nothing to the contrary." In the Common Journals of the same date: "Upon question. Ordered that Dr. Beard of Huntingdon be written to by Mr. Speaker, to come up and testify against the Bishop. The order for Dr. Beard to be delivered to Mr. Cromwell." The order was in vain, for Charles promptly dissolved Parliament, and saw it again only after 11 years.

And so the last ray of sunshine sinks behind the Port Holme, silhouetting the great mound where Edward the Elder built his castle to guard the river; the flow of Ouse fades from molten gold to a deep blue—"the hyaline of drifting glooms"; water fowl and frogs begin their nightly plaint and the water gurgles below the bridge piers which Ouse has fretted for over six hundred years. The bridge loafers have wended homewards,

"Leaving the world to darkness and to me,"

for the chimes of St. John's are sounding ten of the night in just the same metallic tone as when little Nollykin was being made "regenerate of water and of the Holy Ghost" beneath its roof one April day of 1599. "And so to bed," to dream I am a little boy in my "best cap and breeches" in hand of my nurse witnessing great junkettings in the streets of Huntingdon. And the people cheer and cheer again as a gaily dressed cavalier "in gilt velvet with fringing" rides by, seemingly "trussed up in a high demipique saddle" who keeps bowing and crying in broad Scotch "God bless ye—God bless ye." And then as his horse shies slightly at the noisy crowd "Ud's fish! dinna press sae nigh. Gang to the deil wi' ye! Saul of me body! haud me horse—haud me horse, mon, or he'll spang on end and coupit me endlang on the causeway. A pox on ye wi' a your claverings—ye fules.†

† James' nervous horsemanship was notorious. Just such an incident is recorded in Scott's "Fortunes of Nigel," from which I have culled something of his style of speech when anything went amiss at public functions.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUNTINGDON TO ST. IVES.

" To his old shores the river
A new song is singing,
And young shoots were springing
On old roots for ever.

Day daisies were dancing,
And flags flamed in cluster,
On the dark stream a lustre,
Now blurred and now glancing.

A tall reed down weighing
The sedge warbler fluttered;
One sweet note he uttered,
Then left it soft swaying.

A dream ever moulded
Afresh for new wonder,
Still opening asunder,
For the stream many-folded.

Till sunset was rimming
The west with pale flushes
Behind the black rushes,
The last light was dimming.

And the lonely stream, hiding
Shy birds, grew more lonely,
And with us was only
The noise of our gliding.

—LAWRENCE BINYON.

PASSING below Huntingdon Bridge I discover the people of Huntingdon have yet a third aim in life, beside the two mentioned by Cowper—to fish. I have never seen so many fishermen on one reach of river in my life. I supposed some piscatorial tournament was on. But no—it was the daily round and common task. Fishermen who were compelled to temporarily suspend operations appeared to stake out their claim and leave a ticket on a stick stuck into the bank, lest a rival should jump his special swim.

The Ouse has here spread into a lordly river of forty-five or fifty yards across, bounded on the right by illimitable meadow land, while one tree-embowered village after another lies secluded a brief space from the left bank, yielding charming vistas through the foliage which shades the river. Hartford (26 miles 2 furlongs), the first village on the left, with its horse ferry and its church tower in the background, is a peep into the land of Constable. This was a favourite spot of Cowper. "The Church there," he says, "is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river that it washes the wall of the churchyard." And then four churches, two on either side, come in view—Wyton and Houghton on the left, and across the wide meadowland to the right, Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey. Here to Wyton

Church, on the 28th September, 1795, came Charles James Fox to be married, I presume, because it was such a sequestered spot, to one Elizabeth Bridget Cane. The Church register witnessed by Mary Dandville, Ladysmaid, and Jeremiah Bradshaw, Parish Clerk, suggests a mesalliance. The marriage was kept secret until 1802, and Mrs. Fox does not feature in the last four years of his life, which ended in 1806. Perhaps she was fortunate, for there could have been little place in his earlier meteoric career for domesticity, and Mrs. Elizabeth Fox (née Cane) would scarcely have gone down well with the great ladies of the Whig coterie, devoted to "Dear Charles."

Below Wyton the river divides into two branches, one passing by flood gates on the right and circling round by pleasant ways to Hemingford Abbots the other, the main stream, passing on to Houghton Mill—quite a beauty spot of the Ouse, with its church, ancient wooden mill, and tiny village, grouped above the mill race (27 miles 3 furlongs). Here is a spot where I would fain dream away a peaceful summer. The two streams unite just beyond Hemingford Abbots lying in a backwater. It is with a sigh of regret I reach its dim vistaed backwaters and tree shadowed island. A church and primitive hamlet cluster on the banks hard by—a fair and peaceful scene. This spot—Battcock's island—one of the beauty spots of the Ouse, was painted by Yeend King, and the picture, exhibited in the Academy under the title of "Sleeping Waters," which is reproduced here. A few hundred yards on, at Hemingford Grey, and the Ouse will have passed its last Arcadian bower, for the winter of its discontent is near, the long, weary struggle seawards across the steppes of the Fenland is soon to begin. And my heart warms to these folks who have discovered this deep-bowered retreat, peopled houseboat and tent annexes, and are now enjoying after-tea repose, or reading their books, their punts

" Moored to the cool bank in the summer heat,
Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills."

'They must be nice people who can find their simple pleasures in this charming river nook.

As we drift down to Hemingford Grey we pass a red brick Queen Anne mansion on our right, a meadow's width from the Ouse. Here in the early decades of the XVIIIth century dwelt one—John Gunning, Esq.—described as of Hemingford Grey, Hunts, and Castlecoot, Co. Roscommon. And here to him was born in 1733 a daughter Maria Gunning, and in 1734 another daughter Elizabeth Gunning, and three other daughters appeared in orderly succession. Here in this Ouse-side meadow doubtless they frolicked and played, and picked cuckoo flowers and forget-me-nots—and they grew to wondrous beauty—did these "beautiful Misses Gunning." At some unknown date John Gunning—an Irishman, I presume—and his daughters departed to Roscommon—leaving two little sisters to sleep in the chancel of Hemingford Grey church—and took up their abode in a ramshackle—possibly mythical—castle in Co. Roscommon—like Barry Lyndon's Castle Brady. In due course Maria and Elizabeth came up for the season in Dublin—to make their curtsy to the Lord Lieutenant, and receive his kiss—for Lord Lieutenants of Ireland were, until recent times, privileged to kiss all debutantes—and so appeared at the banquets at the Castle—the horseraces at the Phoenix, and the *ridottos*—routs and balls of Dublin, albeit, rumour says they had to borrow their friends' clothes to appear in. And then these two beauteous maidens

descended upon London in 1752—aged 19 and 18, and their grey Irish eyes, fair faces, and slyph-like forms took London by storm, and “un bon parti” falls to each. Horace Walpole tells how Elizabeth married the Duke of Hamilton “with the ring of a bed curtain at 12.30 a.m. at Mayfair Chapel,” and of how the noble mob at the next Drawing Room—regardless of decorum—clambered upon chairs and tables to see her enter. She was destined to be twice a Duchess—marrying for her second husband the Duke of Argyll, and to be the mother of four Dukes. She seems to have grown haughty in her state of splendour, and rudely rebuffed poor Boswell. Maria married the Earl of Coventry. Despite her beauty, she was rather stupid, and much amused George II. by telling him she was dying to see a Coronation. A. C. Benson once rowed painfully up from his Fen home to Hemingford Grey, and in “At Large,” limns the charm of the place with a brush, which I cannot emulate. “A house embowered in leaves, a churchyard beside the water, and a church that seemed to have almost crept to the brink to see itself mirrored in the stream—the place mortals call Hemingford Grey.” But though I have none of his literary gift of word painting—I have more courage—or shall I say effrontery—for I was ever an invader on the Ouse, as I have said before. Benson writes, “Close to us here in the Churchyard was a wall, with a big solid Georgian (it is Queen Anne) house peeping over, blinking with its open windows and sun-blinds on to a smooth shaded lawn—full of green gloom and peace. Why did it all give one such a sense of happiness and peace—even though one had no share in it, and even though one knew that one would be treated as a rude and illegal intruder if one stepped across and used it for one’s own”? As for me—I have no such qualms of timidity, and because courage is always rewarded—here am I seated comfortably in the drawing room of that Ouse-side house, with its

Living river by the door
A nightingale in the sycamore,

enjoying the gracious hospitality of the chatelaine—listening to the caw of rooks in the giant plane tree which shadows the house, and gazing across the river to the wide meadows and Houghton Church, and it is all vastly pleasant. And then my host and hostess stroll with me by the river balustrade, studded with standard lamps, ready to light an evening garden fete, and we talk of the Gunnings and of the Ouse, and of artists who come and go with inspiration from this Ouse paradise, and discuss as to whether Benson was not mistaken in saying Cowper wrote here that rubbishy little poem about his dog and a water lily. Poor Cowper—he must have been in his most despondent and jaundiced mood when he wrote of this spot “My lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons—nor pleasant prospects—all flat and insipid—in the summer adorned with willows, and in the winter covered with a flood.” Surely he could never have leaned over this balustrade above the river and paced this fair shady garden, and yet found no rest to the soul in this deep bowered retreat. But there—I think he never really loved the Ouse—despite he lived twenty years upon its banks. And then we stroll to the Church, where close beside the river wall of the Churchyard I find a tombstone—

George Gordon Fraser
Born April 11, 1859
Died Feb. 15, 1895

my old schoolfellow—who spent most of his artist life on the banks of Ouse and died in its waters.

In the Church I decipher the stone in the Chancel floor, where sleep two little Gunning sisters, who faded away like the roses in autumn—and I seem to see John Gunning on Sunday morning marshalling his row of fair daughters into yonder pew—where they arrange their silks and furbelows and settle the ribbons of their bonnets. And presently the Parish Clerk below “the three decker” growls out the Psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” And John Gunning in his deep bass, and the girls in soft sopranos—tinged with Irish brogue, duly respond, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures—He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

And so we wend back to the river garden, and my day dreams are scarcely interrupted as a fair maiden comes threading her way down the shady path. Is it Elizabeth or Maria? I decide it is Elizabeth, and when my hostess introduces me to the daughter of the house I still dream on that it is Elizabeth come back to smile sweetly upon us in this fair garden, for the XXth century can well hold its own with the XVIIIth.

The last mill upon the river, Hemingford Mill, another ancient wooden relic of the past, seems to me a sad epitome of my poor river, of his wasted forces and decayed industries. I seem to hear the Spirit of the Waters say: “You humans of to-day, you have no use for my labour and my power, which I gave in faithful service to your forefathers. Then for the rest of my way you shall serve my purpose, and you shall build your innumerable pumping stations, and instal mighty engines, whose incessant toil shall scarce avail to bear my waters seaward over those vast Fenlands yonder to the east.” When the last rose of summer fades, when your rod has made its last cast over your favourite pool, when “Auld Lang Syne” scatters old comrades from the feast, the human soul repines. So I repine, for the mill of Hemingford is the last stage of charm and river beauty. We shall see no more how—

“On this side the island—where the pool
Eddies away—are tangled mass on mass,
The water weeds, that net the fishes cool,
And scarce allow a narrow stream to pass;
Where spreading crowfoot mars
The drowning nenuphars,
Waving the tassels of her silken grass
Below her silver stars.”

* * * * *

Below Hemingford we sight St. Ives. Something has happened to one of its two church spires, for its summit has been shorn off. An unfortunate airman in 1917, flying low, and presumably with the sun in his eyes, struck the steeple of All Saints' Church, and crashed with aeroplane and steeple into the nave of the church—to his death.

On our left a last spur of the Northamptonshire highlands slopes downwards to St. Ives. It is curious to reflect that from that last ridge of highland, going due east, the Ural Mountains will show the first elevation ranking above a hummock or a mole hill. Of St. Ives (30 miles 4 furlongs) one can but admit it is not attractive from any standpoint. But its ancient six-arched bridge, with its house projecting from the centre into the stream,

is of great architectural interest. The building is, of course, the original Bridge Chantry, like the one I have described as once existing at Bedford, and of which, I believe, only two examples survive, at Bradford-on-Avon and Wakefield. The lower portion is of stone like the bridge, and shows the remnants of ecclesiastical windows, replaced with modern casements, the whole building spoilt by a cheap brick upper story above the ancient structure. The building seems to have had a chequered career, once a light-house, a too-riotous bargee public, even a Nonconformist Chapel, so tradition tells, and now a dwelling house.

A statue of Oliver Cromwell stands in the market, describing him as a townsman, 1631—1636, when he followed farming, and varied it by stirring up the Fenmen to resist the drainage schemes of the Adventurers, as I tell elsewhere.

St. Ives has none of the charm of Huntingdon. Its palmy days were ended with the decay of the river navigation, and since then it would seem to have resigned itself to drowsy repose.

The lock of St. Ives, which is now-a-days the first really workable lock we have encountered since Bedford, recalls an incident of what I suppose must be regarded as youthful turpitude, though there are usually features in boyish iniquity of bonhomous lightheartedness which tend to alleviate the guilt. We who perpetrated it, some five-and-forty years ago, are now elderly reputable people, and, of course, we have long mended our ways. It fell out on this wise. We started one summer holiday for a joyous river trip from Bedford to the Fens, equipped with a tent, a kettle and frying pan, a hunk of boiled pork, a Dutch cheese, and a light purse, as was the manner of boys in those days, when pocket money was on a less lavish scale. Now the navigation of the Ouse had recently passed through a period of inanition to final death, and locks might open or might not, lock-keepers might attend or might have been withdrawn. At Bedford a lock-keeper still continued an anæmic official existence, and demanded of us the prodigious sum of seventeen shillings as a pass through all locks to St. Ives. Says Shakespeare, "Base is the slave who pays." Our financial position would have been ruined by such extortion. We explained that we had no intention of paying for problematic locks, and if he did not let us through free, well—we should wait until he went to his breakfast, his dinner, or his bed, and then pull over. He was uncertain of his own official powers, but at least he was certain we should have to pay lower down the river, and finally he dismissed us as "tarnation young varmint."

All went well on the voyage until we reached the lock of St. Ives. There, as long ago at Huntingdon, there dwelt in charge of the lock a "myinion of the time," also called Grey. The way was definitely barred, no guile or care would here avail against "the power of Grey." The said Grey admitted us to the lock, closed its gates and lowered us down, our hearts sinking with our boat, and demanded our credentials. "We had no lock tickuts?" Then we could turn up seventeen "shilluns" and "be quick about it." The "shilluns" being not turned up, after many threats and oaths that we could stay there until we did pay, he departed, and left us prisoners in the lock, for there was no scaling its dripping walls, and even if so, our boat was there. I remember it was hot and stuffy down there, and we became a prey to despair. After an hour or so our gaoler returned, and long and angry parley again ensued. We were adjectival varmint, tikes, and thieves, in the opinion of Mr. Grey.

Finally, no "shilluns" appearing, he adopted an attitude of compromise, for he could not keep us prisoners indefinitely. We must return his way in some three days to get back to Bedford. "Well, then, we was to write to our pa or our ma, and explain our dreadful position, that unless that seventeen shilluns was sent to us by postal order, addressed care of Mr. Grey, St. Ives Lock, Hunts., arriving in the next three days, then it was prison for us varmint at the least." These were his final terms, and because our position was hopeless, immured in those dripping lock walls, we accepted. Our ma and our pa must be informed by letter. He released us, and we went our way rejoicing, and soon forgot all our troubles amid the joys of camping out in the Fens, and the distressful letter remained unwritten.

Four days later we arrived on our return voyage within distant view of St. Ives Lock, and anxious thoughts returned. We held a council of war upon the bank. Clive, in his council of war before the Battle of Plassy, could scarce have held more anxious debate than we. Eventually a scheme of attack and strategy was agreed upon. Who the originator of the plan was I know not, though, of course, my fellow-conspirators to this day lay it at my door. We proceeded to prepare the "*mise en scène*." My face was chalked to a ghastly pallor, for a school boy's pocket always contains pilfered chalk, my head was enveloped in a wet towel bandage, on which I believe a little blood was dramatically smeared, and I was laid at the bottom of the boat, evidently in an alarming state of debility and collapse. In weary and depressed fashion my mates rowed the boat to the foot of the lock, where Mr. Grey's "morning face" presaged storm. The "mynion" informed us that "there warnt no letter from our pa and ma, and that he had sent for the poliss, who was a coming quick." And then parley began. "Some dreadful complaint had overtaken their companion, sunstroke or burst blood vessel, they knew not what. Meantime his condition was alarming--and he was silly in his head," which seemed confirmed by loud groans from the suffering one prostrate in the boat. Under these painful circumstances it was impossible to continue our voyage to Bedford, we and the boat must be put upon the train *en route* for Bedford. Did Mr. Grey know anybody who could cart it to the station? As our calculations anticipated, Mr. Grey did know someone, provided he was paid ten "shilluns" for the job, he himself having a hand "kyart." This, too, we had reckoned upon, and we knew further that the loading of the same "kyart" must be at the yard above the lock.

All was agreed, and the truculent one, mollified by the prospect of a profitable job, served us through the lock. Slowly the upper gates opened, and my companions edged gently through until the boat was clear. Then, hey presto! the sick man sat suddenly up, and with wild cries exhorted his brethren of the oar to give way for dear life, and so they did. The "mynion" stood for a moment open mouthed, then realising he had been "had," ran across the lock gate, and pursued us along the bank with volleys of abuse, stones, and clods of earth. But the river was wide, the oarsmen on their mettle, and dodging his bombardment we put up a return barrage of derisive taunts, that he must be sure to be up to time at the station with the "kyart," or there would be no ten "shilluns," that our pa and ma would be sure to call and thank him for his great kindness to their poor boys, and such aggravating remarks as only schoolboys can invent. At last some barrier barred Mr. Grey's further pursuit upon the bank, and we eased up to give play to further gibes, to kiss our hands to him, and finally we rowed away,

leaving him breathless and gibbering. And so with extra precautions against further lock "traps," we reached Bedford without payment of any of the seventeen "shilluns," a sum which, I presume, we never possessed between us at the start.

Of course, it was most audacious and reprehensible conduct, for which I offer no defence. Still, after all these years, I confess it fails to lie heavily upon my conscience, which I suppose has grown pachydermatous when it is concerned with "mynions of the time," sojourning upon the banks of the Ouse.

On the left bank, beyond the town, lie the fields once farmed by Oliver Cromwell—"gross boggy lands," writes Carlyle, "fringed with willow trees at the east end of the small town of St. Ives." Of his life here Carlyle finds little to tell, save "here of a certainty Oliver did walk and look about him habitually during those five years from 1631 to 1636: a man studious of many temporal and many eternal things. His cattle grazed here, his ploughs tilled here, the heavenly skies and infernal abysses over arched and under arched him here."

From St. Ives to Earith I am unable to make any excuse for the Ouse. St. Ives is the limit—the utmost limit of boating in search of the picturesque. Always a dreary stretch of seven miles to Earith, now that navigation has practically ceased and no local authority is interested, it is a weed-clogged stream in summer, a roaring torrent in winter, bordered by flat weary desolate banks. A forlorn little hamlet, Holywell, serves a ferry a few miles below St. Ives. At Over the Fen banks begin. A staunch at Brownshill alone breaks the monotony and then the weary little village of Earith. Decrepitude is overtaking the Ouse. It is as though I met a dear old friend who has let himself go, unshaved, unbrushed, with dirty boots and frayed trousers. When I must voyage to the Fen this way I confess that I have usually hired some sturdy person to ply my bark between St. Ives and Earith and gone thither by train to meet it and I was much younger when I last braved this desolate reach. So I pay off my crew at St. Ives and send the canoe on to await me at Earith (38 miles).

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE LOCK GATES AT EARITH.

"A sea of land, far reaching to the sky,
Long dykes, whose mist at even dims the air.
Tall reeds and waving grass, the lonesome lair
Whence startled coot and duck and moorhen fly.
The plovers' call, the herons' plaintive cry,
Break the soft stillness born of nature's prayer
Till birds and reeds and stream all seem to share
The calm in which the rushes scarcely sigh.
O lone Fenland, where silent nature sleeps
As through thy meads the sluggish river creeps,
Edged by the blue forget-me-not, towards the sea.
They who best know thee, know thy bosom keeps
Deep stored, great lessons all may learn of thee,
O dim weird land, enwrapped in mystery."

—T. F. FULLARD.

EARITH is a point where Father Ouse drops into a wayward, dissolute untamable flood, waging an agelong strife against the utmost endeavour of man to curb, divert and direct his waters, where he did not wish them to flow. As the Philistines tried new ropes and green withies, only to find the sleeping Samson wake out of sleep and cast their shackles from him, so the Fenmen have banked and delled and imprisoned the Ouse only to find ruefully that the giant only slept nor had "his great strength gone from him," as widespread inundation and disastrous destruction of property has proved again and again. From Earith the Ouse via the Hundred Foot has still some thirty-seven miles to flow to the bar at Lynn, but I doubt if any British river has experienced stranger vicissitudes and seen and made more of unrecorded history than the Ouse in these last miles of its senile decay.

We paddle our canoe to the left bank below the village of Earith, land and climb the bank and sit upon the gates of the great staunches of the Old Bedford River which Francis, Earl of Bedford, dug in 1631 by direction of his Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden. And here I must talk, if my reader would gather any sane understanding why our canoe should go further on this forbidding looking river, and why to me, a Fenman by birth, it has all the allure and charm which hang around a notorious highwayman or a renowned criminal. Over there, on the further bank, a hundred yards ahead of us, are the towering gates of the Hermitage Lock, through which passes the Old West River, the original course of the Ouse, by Ely to Lynn, now dwindled to a weed-encumbered ditch until reinforced by the Cam at Harrimer or Pope's Corner. Our voyage will go that route presently. And here between the Old Bedford River and the Hermitage Lock, running parallel with the Old Bedford River (with

the washes,* or broad open valley, to take flood waters, intervening), is the New Bedford River or Hundred Foot, which conveys the bulk of Ouse water directly to Denver Sluice twenty-one miles away and thence by another seventeen miles of estuary to the sea. It is an open tidal way, the flow penetrating up to the Suspension Bridge, which here crosses it, shut in by high banks. It trends away majestically to the horizon with monotonous straightness, only once deflecting slightly in its twenty-one miles, probably owing to some engineering miscalculation. A bridge in the far distance, like a thread of cotton drawn across it, a pumping station chimney or a windmill alone break the monotonous view. The sea water from Lynn swings daily up and down its length, bearing floating masses of weed and refuse on its surface, while high mud banks shut off all view. There is no pleasure trip that way and I have no intention of making what would be my seventh passage down it. Why I voyaged it six times before I really do not know, save that I am a Fenman and this grim water-way entices me on.

On one of my voyages on the Hundred Foot I was belated with a party of six at the "Pike and Eel" or the "Spade and Becket,"† or the "Fish and Duck" or one of those oddly named bargee inns below the bank. Where the others slept I know not; my bed was the tap room table and our combined bill was 5/- and attendance—and fleas—extra, and all dear at the price. Added to it all, my host, befuddled overnight with, I suspect, opium, the champion remedy against "The Bailiff of Marshland," the ague, had miscalculated the anchorage of our boat on a falling tide. Result next morning it lay heeled over high on the mud slope full of dirty water and the camera and other impedimenta of a careless voyager were hopelessly ruined.

With a stout boat, a south-west wind and an ebbing tide it offers a fine sail down. Once in the folly of youth I spun down its length in an Oxford dingy, a rickety craft in a puffing wind. The lock keeper at Denver admonished me "I 'ad oughter have been drowneded for sure and he'd have been kep' grappling at me corpse for three or four tides afore he'd 'ooked me." The risks of my spin before the wind as put to me "bargeely" had never occurred to me. In case of a capsized to secure a footing on its slimy banks would be impossible except at distant spots and a swimmer might well find himself exhausted, or worse still, entangled in the masses of floating weeds long before he found a haven. Kingsley in "Prose Idylls" gives a graphic description of what he calls "this noble river," whereas many engineers now consider it a costly and colossal blunder. Smiles in "Self Help" goes one better or rather

* A dam at this point called the "Seven Holes" admits the Ouse water at flood time into a sort of pound, known as the Welney Washes, between the Old and New Bedford Rivers. In great floods this pound will be nine feet in depth. This system of impounding water was the pet idea of Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, the Washes being constructed, as he expressed it, for the surplus water to "bed in," until such time as the Hundred Foot River should be capable of taking them off to the sea. At the lower end of the Washes, near Denver Sluice, the Welney Lake Sluice runs the water off the Washes into the Hundred Foot. The same system is seen in the Whittlesey Washes, between the New Nene and Morton's Leam, between Peterborough and Guyherne.

Old Bedford River.—Some fifty years ago, one Parallax advertised in the *Scientific Opinion*, defying "all philosophers, divines, and scientific professors to prove the rotundity of the earth, and to exhibit a convex rail canal or lake, wagering £500 to £50." The challenge was taken up, and the affair "came off" on the Old Bedford River. The details are given in the Judgment of Cockburn C. J., in *Hampden v. Walsh*. Law Reports I., Q.B.D., 189.

† This is not a printer's error for the "Spade and Bucket." A "becket" is a gaulcher or claydigger's spade.

worse and belauds Vermuyden, who planned this and much more wrong-headed drainage and almost ruined Francis and William of Bedford and their fellow "Adventurers," and succeeded in ruining himself and ended in obscure and abject poverty. The Hundred Foot was dug in 1649 by William, created under William III. first Duke of Bedford, who employed 500 Scotch prisoners from the battle of Dunbar and one thousand Dutch "Navigators" (hence the word *navvy*); its object being to carry the Ouse waters by the most direct route to the sea, which seemed a very sweet and reasonable plan. But short cuts do not always shorten journeys. I fancy Father Ouse to this day lays a finger beside his nose and chuckles over the guileless Dutchman, who thought he had circumvented this wily old river, but in vain. But it is premature to talk of draining problems ere we have learnt the need which caused them, and I must wait until my canoe reaches Denver Sluice to explain the inner meaning of the works at Earith.

Now light your pipes and sit beside me on the Old Bedford River Staunch and look over the vast level, treeless plain of the Great Fen stretching for one thousand three hundred square miles. Mark on the map on page 161, the outline of the surrounding highlands and how here and there rise from the Fen little eminences, once islands in a waste of water. Their names ending in *ea* or *ey* still tell what once they were, Ramsey, Welney, Wittlesey, Thorney, Manea, Stonea, Coveney, Stuntney, etc.—an archipelago—with Ely as the great mother island, crowned with her vast Cathedral, rising out of the great level. In former times for five and twenty miles north of Ely and away south and west one rippling lake extended and men went by boat over it to the sand-dunes that divided it from the seat at King's Lynn, or to Peterborough, or Cambridge, standing on the marge of this inland sea. To the east lay a tangle of lake and channel, of marsh and islet, haunt of wild fowl, paradise of wild flowers, teeming with fish and swarmed with insect life of every description.

Until about a hundred odd years ago, on the islands and along the banks dwelt a hardy race, living in houses erected on platforms above the level of the water, the walls and roof thatched and wattled with reeds, gaining a livelihood by chasing wild fowl and catching fish—the Fen "sloggers." They traversed the marshes in canoes; they leapt ditches and pools with leaping pole, or stalked on stilts, called "sketches"; in winter they took to pattens, as the Fenmen still call skates. In summer they cultivated such patches of soil as appeared above the surface of the water and grazed their cattle on the coarse grass of these "summer" lands.

Drayton in his "Polyolbion" thus depicts the life of the Fenman of the past:—

"The toiling fisher here is tewing of his net;
The fowler is employed his limed twigs to set;
One underneath his horse to get a shoot doth stalk;
Another over dykes upon his stilts doth walk:
There other with their spades the peats are squaring out.
And others from the cars are busily about
To draw out sedge and reed for thatch and stover fit:
That whosoever would a landskip rightly hit,
Beholding but my Fens shall with more shapes be stored
Than Germany or France or Tuscan can afford."

Who but can feel the charin of such a free life? A monk of Peterborough

writing in 1150 of the site of Peterborough in this waste of waters, thus describes it "When the first founder saw this site, so excellent, so eminent, so pleasant, so suitable, most fertile and most jocund, abounding in everything and most beautiful, as it were an earthly Paradise offered them by God, they founded a monastery there.* Such was the view of all born Fenmen, that it was the land of the free, a land of plenty where the necessities of life lay to hand at their doors, for did not the very "hogs drop soap and the cows drop fire."† And still imagination lingers regretfully over the past of the Fen, the shining meres, the golden reed beds, the countless wild fowl, the strange and beautiful insects, the wild nature, all the mystery and majesty which haunted the Fen for many a hundred years.

But all did not view the Fens in so rosy a light, especially visitors to it; Defoe, in his tour through Great Britain, gives his impressions of a visit to Ely in 1722, and it should be noted that 1722 is long after Vermuyden and the Adventurers were supposed to have reclaimed the Fens.

"As these Fens appear covered with water, so I observed, too, that they generally at this latter part of the year appear also covered with fogs; so that when the downs and higher grounds of the adjacent country were gilded with the beams of the sun, the isle of Ely looked as if wrapped up in blankets, and nothing to be seen but now and then the lantern or cupola of Ely Minster. One could hardly see this from the hills and not pity the many thousands of families that were bound to be confined in those fogs, and had no other breath to draw than what must be mixed with these vapours and that steam which so universally overspreads the country. But, notwithstanding this, the people, especially those that are used to it, live unconcerned, and as healthy as other folks, except now and then an ague, which they make light of; and there are great numbers of very ancient people among them."

I can imagine Samuel Pepys cursing freely when on the 18th September 1663, he paid a visit to some Fen cousins.

"I began a journey through the Fens along dikes where sometimes we were ready to have our horses sunk to the belly. We got by night with great deal of stern and hard riding to Parson's Drove, a heathen place. Found my cousins poor wretches in a sad, poor, thatched cottage like a poor barn. . . . To bed in a sad, cold, nasty chamber but was bit cruelly by the gnats; up, and after eating a dish of cold cream which was my supper last night too, away over most sad fens, all the way observing the sad life which the people of the place, who they do call 'breedlings' if they be born there, do live, sometimes rowing from one spot to another, then wading to Wisbeach."

I fancy these poor "breedlings" saw no more of their fine cousin from London Town. But this is all past history.

The industry of man, of which I shall speak later, has changed the character and aspect of the Fen. The meres have been pumped dry, too dry in

* In like strain William of Malmesbury, at the same period writes of Thorney Isle and Abbey as "a very Paradise for that in pleasure and delight it resembles heaven itself."

It is probable that the Fens deteriorated greatly after the epoch of these writers. Owing to a great gale which occurred on the morning of St. Martin's Day, 1236, and blew for eight days, the sea broke over the embankments and surged inland past Wisbech, driving back the river and drowning the levels. A similar catastrophe occurred seventeen years later. Dr. Adam Mercer, writing in 1505, describes the Fens as "one of the most brute and beastly of the whole realm, a land of marshy agues and unwholesome swamps."

† Cow dung was dried and used for fuel, and pigs' manure was prepared and used for soap.

fact, the bogland has been drained. Where the fowler used to boat after wild duck, now turnips are hoed; where the net was drawn by the fisherman, wave cornfields. I suppose that reason and conscience ordain that it is fitting that the picturesque and the romantic should have given way to the useful and the prosaic.

A dreary land as you view it through mist or rain; but see it in autumn sunshine, with mile upon mile of ripening corn, its pastures dotted with innumerable horses and cattle—a very garden of the Lord. Over there to the north—Crowland—whence the good Saint S. Guthlac sent a party of monks across the Fen and founded a little Latin school at Grantabrigge, now the University of Cambridge. If you would know more of the Fen, read Charles Kingsley's charming account in "Prose Idylls" to which I am largely indebted. The Fen is the last home of dying causes and species. Here Hereward, the last of the English, made his stand against the Normans. Here the last Great Copper Butterfly, the Great Bustard and many another now extinct creature held its last home and here still, in Wicken Fen, alone in England, may be found the Great Swallowtail Butterfly, while at Brandon on the edge of the Fen still lingers on, as I shall tell, the most ancient industry in the world. You must sit a little longer on the staunch gate, for you must know more of the Fenland if you would understand the history of our friend the Ouse. The 1,300 miles of Fenland stretch across part of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire to the Wash, and through it plough their way seaward, the Nene, the Welland, the Witham, the Ouse, draining 5,850 square miles and many another meandering stream or straight dyke. It is a district which has puzzled the engineering skill of every generation since the Romans. The debris of the eastern coast, swept southward by tide and current, turns into the Wash and there forms into vast mud banks, across which one gazes from Lynn to Wisbech, haunt of myriads of wild fowl.

Before the Fen was drained, this seaborne barrier backed up the mud brought down by the rivers and stopped their already sluggish flow. This caused the water of the rivers and the rainfall to spread inland in a maze of shifting streams, shallow meres and bog, the rivers instead of draining, serving only to flood the lands while the sea-tide swept inland for many miles. After many theories as to the original cause of this wild confusion of land and sea geologists generally accept the following. The high white cliffs of Hunstanton, called Hunstanton Ness, are familiar to most of us. This chalk ridge once extended to the Lincolnshire coast and within this ridge was a plain of soft blue clay—the present Fenland. The continuous fret of the sea from outside and the wear of the rivers within which intersected it broke down this barrier and the sea tide scoured out the clay, save banks here and there which are the Fen islands of to-day, and there for long ages ensued a battle of all the elements. The Wash therefore, as Skerthley points out, is not an estuary and the Fen a river plain. It is a bay; it is not the seaward continuation of a river channel, a breach of the coast from the land, but an indentation of the land by the sea. That is the great problem of the engineer; for a river plain has always sufficient slope to carry off its water, while a sea plain has little or none and that is decreasing in the Fen by the shrinkage of peat.

Of its geological formation, gravel, peat and silts, I shall speak of only one feature, the layer of peat covering nearly the whole Fen, itself covered in many parts by sandy silt and weak clay, washed up and deposited by the tides, now forming some of the richest pasture and cornland in England. Peat is not growing in the Fens, in fact it is disappearing, partly by drainage and

cultivation, partly by fuel cutting. Peat only grows in a fairly cold climate and the English climate is now too warm. When did these peat beds form? The Wash is silting up at the rate of 59 feet a year and in travelling inland from the Wash we consequently pass from newer to older portions of the Fens. Twelve miles of silt brings us to the edge of the peat in Deeping Fen.† These twelve miles probably represent the growth of 5,000 or 6,000 years and that is probably the date of the end of the peat period. As the climate became milder the peat was beaten in its struggle for existence. Dig a hole in the peat and you quickly come upon layers of tree trunks, lying as they fell, all with their heads to the north-east, converted into a sort of bog oak, so near the surface that the plough often hits on them. In many places, as many as five forests appear to have been successively buried. What laid these forests low? Not the sea, for they would have fallen to the south-west. No trace of fire or the axe of ancient man has been found on them. Look a little more closely at one of these trunks. The bark has crumbled away at the bottom of the trunk. This corresponds with the depth of the bed of peat and you have the explanation. It was the peat that killed them. Imagine a forest in full vegetation in a tolerably well-drained area. Now let peat begin to grow, it will gradually creep up the trunks of the trees and keep them constantly chilled, until the sap no longer rises. The tree dies and for years stands gaunt and dead and eventually goes down before the prevailing south-west wind. Forest and peat cannot live together. Five times in succession did forest cover the Fen and five times the deadly peat crept up their trunks and buried them as we now see them. A piece of this Fen oak, pickled I suppose by the acid in the peat, will serve to make a cabinet, but its age probably vastly surpasses that of the Sphinx or Cleopatra's Needle. Kingsley well describes the weird charm of these peat-lands. "Not a town or village stands on them, straight 'droves' or cart tracks cross them, not a hedge-row, only the willows that line the drains, a landscape flat as the sea, and yet over them broods the blaze of wondrous sunsets such as can be seen nowhere else in these islands and occasionally mirages as perfect as in Africa."

It is easy to understand how the fallen trees dammed up the streams, which bewildered in the flats, changed their courses, spread into vast swamps and meres, until the whole Fenland became a Slough of Despond in which Hereward took refuge from the Conqueror.

I have digressed to speak of the peat for a special reason. Peat is like a sponge and as it loses its moisture it shrinks. Hence the gradual draining of the Fens has caused shrinkage of the peat, lessened the natural slope of the ground and increased the engineering problem of forwarding the water to the sea without sufficient drop.

One more glance and I have done "extension lecturing" for the present.

Note the peculiarities of the map:

(1). The rivers of the Fen have apparently a perverse habit of running uphill. Thus the original course of the Ouse by the Old West River. Instead of choosing the flat or direct way to the sea it deliberately cuts through the highlands of Ely. This tells of the distant epoch when the rivers flowed at a much higher level of land and gradually sawed their beds downwards.

(2). You will note that tributaries always enter the main stream at an acute angle and that the nearer the tributary is to the mouth of the main stream,

† Travelling between Ely and King's Lynn it is interesting to note how, some twelve miles short of Lynn, one passes from the extreme fertility of the peat land to the silt land, which loses the distinctive features of the peat fertility.

the more acute the angle at which it enters. This is a very delicate arrangement of nature's mechanics for preserving the slope and velocity of the main stream. No tributary can enter at more than a right angle, for the pressure of the water in the main stream would otherwise prevent the efflux of the tributary.

As a single antediluvian bone will enable an anatomist to reconstruct the original animal, so this natural device enables geologists to read the history of streams and retrace again their much altered original courses.

If you chat with the lock-keeper, he is sure to inform you that you are only twelve feet above the sea and our friend the Ouse has still some thirty-seven miles to go, whereby hangs the whole story of engineering difficulties. He is sure to tell you of the great royal sturgeon which some years ago hailed up from the sea and lurked below the suspension bridge over the Hundred Foot for a whole summer, to the terror of bathers. The great fish obligingly showed himself sometimes, basking in the shallows, to the many who came to see such a monster and was a source of great profit to the water bailiff who stirred him up, when hiding in the pool, with a barge pole for the benefit of sightseers. It was intended to net him at the end of the season but there came a high tide, and, like Mr. Barkis, the sturgeon "went out with the tide," and was seen no more. Sturgeon have been recorded as far up the river as Hemingford Grey.

But time presses, for we must make Ely and our twelve mile voyage by the Old West River, as I know by experience, will be a strenuous struggle against weeds, so to the paddle again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE OLD WEST RIVER AND WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

"And the creeping mosses and clambering weeds,
And the willow branches hoar and dank,
And the wavy swell of the souging reeds,
And the wave worn horns of the echoing bank;
And the silvery marish-flowers that throng
The desolate creeks and pools among
Were flooded over with echoing song."

—TENNYSON, "*The Dying Swan*."

THE great lock gates of the Hermitage, through which my voyage lies, have been, like the Hundred Foot, one of the bones of contention over which Fenmen have argued and wrangled since Cornelius Vermuyden built them in 1631. One party views them as the gateway of salvation, opening the way to a redeemed Fenland; their opponents hold that they uselessly spoiled a fine river, blocked the navigation and did little for the drainage of the Fen. I am a humble disciple of the latter party. I earlier expressed a fear lest my literary bark should founder on a snag, and my river be made to run all sorts of instructive and wearisome themes instead of its own pellucid current. I must confess the Ouse has here ceased to have a pellucid current and may run a course of tedious lecturing for awhile. Eleven miles of weed-encumbered, embanked brook faces me to Pope's Corner, the junction with the Cam and then a broader but very monotonous stream, more like a canal than a river, loafs lazily down past Ely and Littleport to Denver Sluice. The prattling child of Farthinghoe has grown to sear and saddened age and seems here in Fenland to brood sombrely over the vagaries and errors and passions of life and to creep reluctantly towards the inevitable end. But as the furrowed lines of an old man's face tell of the struggle and the battle of life while there is no story to read in the smiling face of a child, so with the Ouse. To my thinking his old age is replete with historic interest, though few have cared to trace it. The facts of it are embedded deep, like tree trunks in the peat, in monumental tomes dealing with the Fen, Dugdale, Badesdale, Kinderley, Wells, Skertchley and many another writer; and only a Fenman has the patience and capacity to unearth them in such wise as to make an intelligible and connected history of the Ouse hereabouts. I can but give the facts in a sort of "pemmican" form. All I dare offer to do is to bid my reader take in hand my map of the Fen (page 161) and follow my wanderings down this uninviting looking river, moor by the bank with me at Aldreth Causeway, Ely, Littleport, for awhile, and bear with the talk, of which I have given warning earlier, and then journey to my bourne—Denver Sluice. There only can I gather up the threads of a history which makes the Ouse singular among British rivers.

Of the Hermitage Sluice, whose gates are opening for me, all you need at present to remember is that Vermuyden in building it practically blocked the original course of the Ouse and diverted its main waters down his New Bedford River or Hundred Foot. He found it a river of two hundred feet broad and fourteen feet deep. The tide ran up it forty-eight miles from

Lynn; floating ketches of fifty tons burden up to St. Ives, Cambridge and Thetford, while boats of twenty tons would come to St. Neots, and to Bedford. The diurnal ebb of the tide, followed by the pent up weight of headwaters, let loose a swift running current which scoured its way to the sea. It is difficult to imagine that this weed-clogged sluggish brook is all that is left of that broad waterway which existed two hundred and twenty years ago, but as a route I prefer it to that great pretentious Hundred Foot.

My voyage on this occasion is a solitary one, as C.B. is to join me at Ely, and perhaps solitude befits the way. I wind along between wide straggling fen banks until I sight what the map euphemistically calls Aldreth High Bridge, three miles from the Hermitage. When I first visited it many years ago it was a miserable little cattle bridge, to cross which a rare cart needed to remove one wheel and the driver shouldered it over, but within the last twenty years a more substantial, albeit a cheap and shoddy structure, has been built. I fancy its passengers scarce average one per week, for it carries no high road and appears to give what is now an unnecessary crossing. "Fen Notes and Queries" say that Aldreth High Bridge was once the only land approach to the Isle of Ely over the Ouse, apart from ferries at Twenty Pence Ferry and Streatham Ferry (now Streatham Bridge) further on. When Archbishop Laud paid a visitation to Ely in 1638, he found all trace of a bridge at Aldreth had disappeared, and he failed even to find a ferry here. A voyager ignorant of history might hold this humble dreary little ditch of a stream and its cheap, shoddy bridge in contempt. But this is a spot of stirring events eight hundred and fifty years ago. What the lordly Thames failed to do, to stop the march of the Conqueror, the Ouse did. For two years it barred his way here, set him a harder task even than Hastings and only finally yielded him passage because the monks of Ely lost heart and courage and betrayed the secret of the Isle of Ely. If you know your Kingsley's "Hereward," as every Fenman does, you will pause here. At the time of the Camp of Refuge, wide swamp and reed beds skirted the broad sullen river offering a barrier of some two miles. What ghosts must haunt this desolate spot! How William built a great floating bridge across the stream, only to be burnt by Hereward, and built it again; how beneath the weight of his soldiers it sagged and dipped and hundreds slid into the treacherous stream or sank in the viscous mud! How Hereward and his men taunted the van of the Normans to leap the gap of muddy water which divided the end of the bridge from the stockaded bank—it is all told by Kingsley's glowing pen. A grim story! As late as 1882 some one hundred and sixty-three bronze weapons were found near this spot and somewhere beneath my keel sleeps an armoured host.

Another four weary miles brings me to Streatham Bridge, a steep narrow bridge, which carries over the Roman Akeman Street from Cambridge to Ely, Littleport, Downham, and King's Lynn. How the Romans ever constructed a road across the Fen I cannot tell; I can but surmise that as they left the firm clay of the uplands and plunged into the great Fen, intervening to Ely, they must have driven down piles and constructed a long wooden causeway. To-day the road emerges from the Fen, to meander along the ridges of the Island of Ely, plunges again into the Fen, to find foothold on a little knob of clay in Southery Fen, Little London, and after another struggle to Hilgay, at last emerges on firm ground at Downham and so on to King's Lynn. It was a truly heroic feat of road making, this Akeman Street—so skilfully directed that it only passes over 9 miles of Fen in all its course.

At Streatham Bridge the usual croaker who haunts bridges informs me that at Pope's Corner the weeds are bad, as weeds had been recently cut all up the Cam. I have a sudden inspiration. I bid the croaker find me a hefty lad of Streatham, he himself declining my offer of employment. To the lad forthcoming I entrust a letter to Mr. Appleyard, boat builder of Ely, bidding him pay the bearer five shillings on safe delivery of canoe and baggage to his care, and I see the youth away in my canoe. In other words I desert my voyage.

William the Conqueror and all his doings have always fascinated my imagination. I have stood in the little stone chamber of the castle of Falaise, in which he was born, and looked from its window down on the tannery yard—it is still a tannery—where dwelt his maternal grandfather, the tanner, and his mother Arletta. I have paid pilgrimage to his tomb in his Abbaye aux Hommes at Caen hard by. Now I purpose to follow his scent, cold eight hundred and fifty years, and approach Aldreth Causeway in his footsteps and see the Isle of Ely as he looked at it with envious and wrathful eyes. So I tramp away along the Akeman Street to Waterbeach, where I haggle for the hire of a bicycle with a huckster who is not sure that I am honest enough to return his bicycle from Ely, but is finally shamed into accepting my bona fides when I show myself ready to leave my watch and chain in pledge. Of course a captious critic will say this is an utterly irregular and unwarrantably digressive interruption of my voyage. Well, there is nothing to miss in the six miles to Ely and I plead that every inch I propose to travel is the land of the Ouse and his son, the Cam, that I am going to skirt the beaches of primæval lagoons and cross the vast Fen which their silts have enriched.

The name of Waterbeach and of its neighbour Landbeach tell that they stand on the verge of the clay uplands, once seaside places so to say, situated on the erstwhile beaches of vast fen meres where the sea had lost power to eat further into the clay. I bicycle to Cottenham Corner, where a road diverges to the village of Cottenham, the cradle of the Pepys family, for he records that 26 householders of the name lived in the village. It was to this corner William the Conqueror advanced from Cambridge. He was getting impatient for he had launched two attacks on Ely by water, from Brandon via the little Ouse and from Reach via the Cam. History tells nothing of their failure, but fail they did. Why he did not push on along the Akeman Road history affords no clue. Possibly in the long interval of six hundred years since the Roman withdrawal the road had decayed and sunk into the devouring peat, or if it still existed Hereward and his Saxons in Ely took care to render it impassable. So the Conqueror diverges and pushes forward a road which winds away skirting the edge of the Fen through Cottenham and Rampton, where he made his headquarters, villages which probably owe their origin to this period of encampment. I leave my bicycle at a farm-house a mile beyond Rampton, for further progress must be afoot; for here William struck away straight for Aldreth Causeway some two or three miles away, and it is scarcely likely to be a bicycle track. Harper ("The Cambridge Road") gives a very exaggerated account of the route where he says "one is plunged into the fearful mud of a mile long drove†

† *A Fen Drove*.—Harper speaks of this track as a "fen drove," the correctness of which term I dispute. Roads proper in the Fen are few, for there is no material of which to make them, and distant farms on the peat land cannot afford such luxuries. Fenmen speak of a high road as "a stone road." In the place of roads there are "droves," straight cart tracks of black, impalpable peat-dust, which lead from homesteads to the main road. They have a beauty all their own, in summer covered with mossy grasses, forget-me-nots, the pink cranebill, and many plants. In winter they are almost impassable.

described on the Ordnance Map as 'Cow Lane,' a dismal maleboge of black, greasy mud that only cattle can walk without difficulty." He must have chosen bad weather when possibly it would be a quagmire, but this is a hot sunny day of August as I turn into a broad grassy baulk hemmed in by gigantic hedges which look as though they had grown untrimmed since William's day, and in fact the route is just as he left it. A rare cart, to judge by a deep rut, passes this way, but I meet no soul along this lone track. And yet to me it is not lonely. Beside me ride ghostly steel cuirassed warriors, whose coursers squelch through the mud. Here march columns of foot soldiers as pioneers to build a road, yard by yard, with fascines of brushwood and tree trunks which are dragged up on great waggons at which Saxon carls strain and tug beneath the lash. Robert of Swaffham (De Gestis Herewardi Saxonis) says: "He (William) led his whole army to Alreheche: he caused also to be brought thither a great pile of wood and stones, and a heap of all kinds of timber and he commanded all the fishermen of the Province to come with their boats to Coftingelade so that they might transport what they had brought to the place." I trace in the winding track and in one abrupt zig zag how they skirted round specially boggy spots, and deep depressions tell where the fascines and trunks have rotted, and the ground sunk in. Gradually the road sinks away off the clay into Iram Drove, and reaches the great Fen a mile from the bridge. It was here the pinch began, to push a road over the quaking, reed-grown bog, which a tide of two feet flow churned into a bottomless morass, and that in face of a Saxon army across on the further bank, and all the time for two long years men sickened and died of ague and marshland fever in this pestilential spot.

Beside the bumpy track a farmer has recently cleaned out a ditch and I curiously rake over the upturned peat. Fragments of broken pottery speak of the debris of camp fires long ago, while I pick up two pieces of thick encrusted iron work, a roughly beaten bolt and what looks to be the cross bar of a horse's snaffle, and a bone. Of course experts will say the first two are merely modern. I hold they came off a Norman farrier's forge. A doctor tells me the bone is human. A map marks "Belsar's Hill," and Harper boldly illustrates it as flanking the causeway. I suppose there once was a hill, as hills go in this flat land, where William erected a tower whereon stood the "Pythonessa" to cast her spells on yonder accursed Saxon over the river, but I cannot find it. It has either subsided into the peat or been ploughed into the cornland or is masked by the autumn crop. A little bridge crosses a side stream and then I am again on Aldreth High Bridge, gazing at the outlines of Ely as William gazed, and tracing the road going up by Haddenham village, by which he finally found his way to Ely after two years' struggle with this obstreperous Ouse, which creeps below, a mere wraith of his former self.

I wend my way back along the baulk, bright with fen flowers, its hedges promising a wealth of blackberries in the late autumn. Kindly nature has long

and become thick viscous mud, in which carts sink to the axle. An old folklore story runs of one Fen "slogger" meeting a stranger on one of these droves, and asking if he had seen a hat. Being told that no hat had been sighted, "I dunner care 'bout the 'at," replied he, "but there's a mon under the 'at, and a 'orse and kyart under 'im." All three had presumably disappeared in the black, oily mud. Ditches line either side of the "drove," dense in summer with bulrushes and sedge. A harrow over them in spring time is their sole repair. Fenmen are reputed to be thirsty souls, and I am not surprised. To walk one of these droves, with the light impalpable peat dust rising to the throat, brings on a thirst which bites one. Added to the fact that all water pumped from the decaying vegetation of peat is bad and often dangerous, the Fenman's fondness for Hollands and strong waters, which he learnt from the Dutch drainers, has some excuse.

ago spread her mantle of turf over this once war-ploughed track and healed the scars of battle; corn fields stretch away to the horizon, the distant hum of a reaper alone breaks the silence, and peace broods over the illimitable Fen. An eerie place to walk at night, when clouds scud across a watery moon and a skein of brent geese go screeching overhead—a sound which startles. A psychic soul might well see in the flitting shadows the wraiths of charging warriors, and hear down wind the cries of battle.

* * * * *

Many people visit the sites of Hastings and Nazeby and Edgehill, and such famed battle sites. But few pilgrims come to this lone spot, and yet it witnessed a grim, long drawn out struggle, with the Ouse as umpire of the day—more like the month-long battles of to-day.

I chat with the farmer and his wife who have housed my bicycle. Nearer to them was another battle field, from which two stalwart sons had never returned to their Fen home. They had heard something of a battle long ago, down there by the Old West. The good dame used to run up and down "Blazers Hill," when a school child, but somehow it had sunk away now-a-days. The farmer had worked on the rebuilding of Aldreth Bridge twenty years ago. In digging the track, as it approached the bridge, so he told me, the diggers unearthed great flat stones a foot below the surface. No doubt William's "fishermen of the Province" brought them across the meres from Northamptonshire, that best of building stone, "Barnack Rag," of which most ancient Fen churches are built. Its transport by water was cheap.

Creighton (*Historical Essays and Reviews*) tells how the Cathedrals of Ely, Peterborough, and Lincoln owe their lavish size and long enduring ornaments to the cheapness and durability of this stone. When water carriage failed through drainage, the church architecture in the Fens and the Marshland dwindled, as the soft "clunch" of Cambridgeshire replaced the once cheaply conveyed Barnack Rag. The magnificent churches of Walpole and Terrington St. Clements, near the Roman sea wall, are built of Barnack Rag. No district in England can show such fine churches as the Fens and the Marshland.†

† The records of Bury St. Edmunds note that William the Conqueror issued a royal mandate to the Abbot of Peterborough exhorting him to allow the Abbot of St. Edmunds to take out sufficient stone from the quarries of Barnack for the erection of the new church, and to exempt it from Melonium, or the usual toll chargeable on its carriage by water. It is recorded that the Monks of Ramsey Abbey paid every Lent 3,000 eels to the Abbey of Peterborough for leave to quarry this stone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST OF THE FEN.

"From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her; without hope of change,
In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the grey-eyed morn
About the lonely moated grange."

—TENNYSON, "*Mariana*."

WITH mind still intent on William and the Ouse, I determine to ride on and see Wicken Fen, the last survival of that Fen which so baffled him at Aldreth.

Returning to Waterbeach, I pass one of those particularly ugly village chapels, bearing on its front, "Spurgeon Memorial Chapel." Its predecessor, a humble, reed-thatched conventicle, burnt down in 1861, gave the first "call" to Charles Spurgeon, and to it he went in his seventeenth year at a stipend of twenty pounds per annum in 1851. It is difficult to estimate the humble beginning of one who within a short time from his "call," was destined to enthral the ears of vast London congregations, and to keep his hold until his death.

The inn of Waterbeach regards my request for lunch as an unreasonable and indelicate suggestion, and refers me on to Clayhythe, some half-mile away, where I find a charming riverside hostel on the banks of the Cam, quite a gay place, for the Cam Sailing Club has a fleet of house-boats near, and pleasure motor boats flit up and down this very dull and fenny tributary of the Ouse from Cambridge. Apparently he, too, is a troublesome stream, for the wall paper of the salon where I am served with an excellent lunch, shows a two feet water mark of his last escapade, a flood in February of this year. Thereafter, with pipe and coffee, I sit on the bank,

"Where Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,"

and consider my surroundings.

The name Clayhythe, which means the Harbour in the Clay, carries the imagination back to Saxon days, when Cambridge was, to all intents, as much a seaport as Wisbech and Lynn are to-day, with Ely lying some fifteen miles off its coast. The *Liber Eliensis* incidentally mentions a ship which came from Ireland to trade at Cambridge in the Xth Century. There were then no fords below Cambridge, for wide lagoons on either side of the river made its banks unapproachable to the traveller on horse or foot. The portion of the Akeman Street, which in Roman times connected Cambridge and Ely, was apparently completely disused in Saxon times, and traffic between Cambridge and Ely until comparatively modern times was done chiefly by boat. Looking at this humble stream of Cam flowing by Clayhythe, it is difficult to realise that Cam-

bridge owes to the Cam and the Ouse its development from St. Guthlac's little Latin School of Grantebrigge into the great University.

Bishop Stubbs, in his "Story of Cambridge," says:—

"The geographical position, and fact of Cambridge being at the head of a waterway directly communicating with the sea, is a factor in the history of the town which cannot be exaggerated. In direct communication with the Continent by means of the river, and on the only or almost the only line of traffic between East Anglia and the rest of England, it naturally became the chief distributing centre of the commerce and trade of eastern England, and the seat of a fair, which, in later ages, boasted itself the largest in Europe.

"It is difficult to estimate the extent or variety of the commerce of those early days, or even to name the staple trade of export which must have found its way by means of the Fenland waters to the Continent, but that it must have been considerable we may at least conjecture from the fact that in the sacking of the Fenland Abbeys, Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey, and Crowland, by the Danes, there is evidence of a great store of wealth, costly embroideries, rich jewels, gold and silver, which can hardly have been the produce of a native industry, but seems to indicate a fair import trade from the Continent. Cambridge became the seat of an English University because it had already become a centre of English trade and commerce, and the busy porter of the river gate, by which the merchandise of Northern Europe, borne to the Norfolk Wash, and the port of Lynn, by the ships of Flanders and the Hanse towns of the Baltic, found its way by the sluggish waters of the Cam and the Ouse to a place thus well fitted to become the great distributing centre of trade for Southern England and the Midlands. Cambridge has ceased to be a distributing centre of the trade of Northern Europe, long lines of barges are no longer brought up by the tides, and no longer float down the ebbing stream. The waters of the Wash have for centuries been silting up. The fame of the town has been eclipsed by the fame of the University; but town and University alike may still gaze at the old timbered wharfs, the clayhythes of the river, as symbols of mighty forces which, in their days, brought men from all ports of Europe to Cambridge, and were potent to make it through many centuries a centre of light and learning to England and to the world."

I am glad to have wandered this way to Clayhythe, to be reminded by its name of a great historian's tribute to Father Ouse and his son the Cam, as having played so great a part in the growth of the great University of Cambridge.

A like tribute is paid to the Ouse by Spencer in the "Faery Queen," though I presume he had no map of it handy, for his topography is to seek.

Next then the plenteous Ouse came far from land,
By many a city and by many a town,
And many rivers taking underhand
Into his waters as
The Cle, the Were, the Guant, the Sture, the Rounne,
Thence doth by Huntingdon and Cambridge flit.
My mother Cambridge whom, as with a crown,
He doth adorn, and is adorned of it
With many a gentle muse and many a learned wit.

My nearest route to Wicken Fen is to ride five miles along the top of the river bank or dyke to Upware. These river banks or dykes are solidly built

and compacted of stiff clay, to resist the pressure of the water they contain. They require the constant work of "bankers," "gaulchers" (clay diggers), and "molers," for even a rat's hole or a mole burrow will soon open way for a breach. Their tops make tolerable paths and horse tracks, but to prevent them being converted into wheel tracks wooden fences are put across them at intervals with the gate in the "drove" below. To ride them on a winter night, as Fen doctors and farmers must do, needs care. It used to be the custom, and I presume still is, to attach a lantern to each stirrup, for the way lies between a swollen river on one side, and the quagmire of the "drove" on the other.

The Cam dykes straggle along, sometimes almost a quarter of a mile distant from their opposite fellow dyke, taking short cuts across bends in the river, an error of engineering by the original drainers, for had they built the banks higher and closer they would have increased the velocity and scouring power of the river, according to Tylor's *Mathematical Calculations* as to the flow of water, quoted on page 198.

This Cam bank was a bumpy track for a bicycle, and I get a fall, though happily not a full toss into the drove, while the dry peat dust blowing up from the drove produced the usual Fen thirst. It was evidently a route very little traversed, as was to be expected, seeing it leads to a place which ostentatiously proclaims that it is five miles from anywhere. Who has not heard of the inn at Upware Ferry on the Cam, entitled "Five Miles from Anywhere. No Hurry"? In pre-railway days, when bargees and their craft passed up and down to Cambridge, and roystering under-grads came down stream, there were fought many Homeric combats of fisticuffs in the riverside meadow, still called "Upware Bustle." One Richard Ramsay Fielder, a dissolute, over-thirsty M.A. of Cambridge, a Matthew Arnold's "Gypsy Scholar," but of wild habits, presided as "King of Upware," circa 1860, over the "Republic of Upware," a hellrake society of those days, membership of which necessitated that the neophyte could hit hard and drink deep. He it was who christened the inn by its strange appellation. Those were "robustious" days at Upware.

A good road out of Upware brings me to Wicken village. This last remnant of Fen, a square mile in area of peaty bog and quaking morass, is owned by the National Trust, and strictly preserved as a last haunt of rare birds, insects and plants, and villagers regard every strange visitor as an ornithologist, botanist, or a "bug hunter." Permission to enter the Fen is only to be obtained from the Secretaries of the Trust at Cambridge or in London, while on one portion of the Fen no one is allowed to set foot. The keeper's son, in his father's absence, kindly takes me a walk along a boggy avenue cut through reeds and sedges and strange aquatic plants. On either side are posts with squares of cork, which I learn are moth traps, for moth hunters, and when smeared with a mixture of sugar, treacle, gin, or methylated spirit, attract clouds of moths, among which the rare Scarlet Tiger and Emperor moth may be found. A sign post strictly forbids smoking in the fen. The reeds are very inflammable, and a carelessly thrown cigarette in August, 1919, caused the rapid destruction of twenty acres of Fen vegetation, while years ago the fire, spreading almost as quickly as a man can walk, nearly destroyed the village of Wicken. Here alone in England is to be found the famed Swallow Tail butterfly, of which accredited butterfly men may take twelve specimens only. The redshank, the lapwing, and the snipe are always on the wing in spring time. Here the boom of a bittern has been heard recently, while the boy tells me ornithologists have been greatly excited lately over a very rare buzzard,

"Mantagues Harrier," long considered extinct, but again inhabiting Wicken Fen. The short-eared owl breeds here regularly. It is a sea of waving reed beds, with dark lily-clad pools, where flourishes a riot of wild flowers, for it is a botanists' paradise, and Skertchley enumerates one hundred and thirty aquatic species of plants as indigenous there. Here still grow the knife like sedge (*Claudium mariscus*), the marsh fern (*Lastræa thelypteris*), the blue marsh fea, marsh orchis, meadow rue, and many others. Here and there stacks of drying sedge for thatching, and piles of "turfs," or peat, recall two traditional occupations of the fenmen. Whittlesea Mere was drained in 1852, but this last remnant of the Fen at Wicken has defied all engineering skill, and is now preserved lest men forget the surroundings wherein their forefathers lived ere the Adventurers took in hand the drainage of the fen. Just such was the foreground which William scanned at Aldreth, a soft and feathery mantle to look at, but to try and thread your way through unguided after heavy rain—well, possibly the keeper would go enquiring if anybody had seen a hat.

Master Barnes was an intelligent lad, and had picked up much curious knowledge of birds and *lepidoptera*, and flowers which flourish hereabouts and nowhere else, from specialists who come here with net, botany tins, and cameras. It is good to think that there is still a refuge for some of the species which would otherwise be exterminated by man's ruthless hand, and go the way of the great bustard, the great copper butterfly, and many another beautiful creature which once habited this land.

My way to Ely lies by Soham. I have said elsewhere that the Fen has a beauty all its own, and my ride to Soham is worthy of record. My route lay direct through the cornfields and crops along an unhedged road. A sunny evening after heavy rains had raised an opalescent haze over the wide Fenlands and the varied colours of the crops beneath a radiant sky, and a cloudscape, such as is seldom seen but in the Fens, made a gorgeous sight. I have seen the tulip country round Haarlem, a brilliant spectacle, with its wide plots of tulips of every hue, but it rather suggested to me a patchwork quilt of crude, gaudy colours. But here a gorgeous vestment of many-broidered hues, softened and harmonized by the evening haze, clothed the land far and wide. Upon a groundwork of golden corn and emerald green root crops are flung the pink flowers of the sainfoin, the snow white of the onion seed, the blue hue of linseed, the brilliant yellow of charlock, and the delicate pinky-white flower of "Brank," a crop peculiar to these parts, grown for horse and fowl food. The warp and woof of nature's mantle is a right royal robe of cunningest weaving. The Fen a dull, depressing land! Methinks it is a poor jejune soul which cannot sense its beauty and its charms in harvest time. At least I have Charles Kingsley on my side, while Thomas Carlyle viewed it with the dyspeptic disapproval with which he viewed much else. People through all ages have either loved or cursed the Fenland. The tower of Soham Church—another of those beautiful Barnack Rag Churches of the Fen—almost deludes me into thinking it was Ely.

The road winds round in a circle, because some hundred years ago Soham Mere, of fourteen hundred acres, occupied the contents of the circle, and Soham still has its "Ship Inn," and other signs which tell of its nautical past. In Soham Churchyard a dear old lady points out to me the tombstone of one Mary, wife of Robert D'Aye, "grand-daughter of Henry Cromwell, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, son of Oliver Cromwell, the Protector," who died on the 5th November, 1765, aged seventy-five years. I learn that I have unwittingly passed the farmhouse, Spinney Abbey, where Henry Cromwell lived in retire-

ment, and dying in 1673 lies buried in Wicken Churchyard. And I learn further how one September day in 1671 he received an unexpected visitor from Newmarket, Charles the Second. Whatever his vices, Charles had the instincts of a gentleman, and I doubt not would pass off this curious interview with his usual cheery sangfroid. Not to be behindhand in information I start to tell the old lady's little granddaughter the tale of how Canute once voyaged across the great mere of Soham to Ely, and heard the sweet singing of the monks of Ely at their vespers. But, bless me, she knew a deal more about Canute than I did. She picked up the tale, and gave me prettily the old stanza of the ancient song :

“ Merie sungen the Munches binnen Ely
 Tha Cnut Ching rew thereby.
 Roweth, cnites, noer the lant
 And here we thes Munches saeng.”

And on she prattles, telling me of Canute crossing the ice from Soham to spend his Christmas at Ely, and of how his nobles said, “ We cannot pass; the King must not pass on the slippery, unsafe ice, which may break and drown us all in the Fen waters.” But Canute, like the stout and pious man that he was, said, “ Hold ice or break ice, I will keep the Feast of Purification with the good monks of Ely. . . . And there be but one bold Fenner that will go before over the ice by Soham Mere and show the way before over the ice, I will be the next to follow.”

Now there chanced to be standing amidst the crowd one Brithmar, a Fenner of the Isle of Ely, that was called from his exceeding fatness “ Budde ” or Pudding, and this heavy man stood forward and said that he would go before the King and show him a way upon the ice across Soham Mere. Quoth Canute, who albeit so great was a small and light man, “ If the ice can bear thy weight it can well bear mine, so go on and I follow.” So Brithmar went his way across the bending and cracking ice and the King followed him at a convenient distance. And one by one the courtiers followed the King and after a few falls on the ice they all got safely to Ely. And for the good deed which he had done King Canute made Brithmar, who was a serf, a free man and gave him some free lands which his posterity held and enjoyed a long time afterwards.

“ Many thanks, little maid ! Your story is good and well told ! I am glad you love stories of the Fen as I do.” A season of insecure ice was much dreaded by fenmen, as completely isolating them and threatening starvation. Dugdale writing of 1772 says :

“ In the winter time, when the ice is strong enough to hinder the passage of boats, and yet not able to bear a man, the inhabitants upon the lands and banks within the Fens can have no help of food nor comfort for body and soul—no woman an aid in her travail, or partake of Communion or supply of any necessity, saving what these poor desolate places do afford where there is no element of good—the air being for the most part cloudy and full of rotten haars; the water putrid and muddy—yea full of loathsome vermin; the earth spongy and boggy, and the fire noisome by the stink of smoky hassocks.” Dugdale, though he wrote a learned History of the Fens, was not a lover of the district.

I ride away skirting the lip of that vanished “ mare de Soham ” and at Stuntney drop sharply into the Fen again, with the vast façade of Ely Cathedral looming up a mile ahead. It is a great sight—its stately western towers, its long nave and central lantern rising greyly above the irregular masses of trees

and houses. Its chief beauty, to my thinking, is Alan de Walsingham's Lantern Tower, that masterpiece of carpentry of which old Fuller quaintly remarks—"When the bells ring the wood work thereof shaketh and gapeth (not defect but perfection of structure) and exactly chocketh into the joynts again so that it may pass for the lively emblem of a sincere Christian who though he hath 'motum trepidationis' of fear and trembling, stands firmly fixt on the basis of a true faith." Since Fuller's day, the bells have been removed lest it "chocketh into the joynts" once too often. I understand the Rev. P. G. Langdon has procured for the Bedford Modern School Museum a model of this marvellous piece of carpentry.

But to me the main inspiration of the great Cathedral lies not here nor in "long drawn aisle and fretted vault." Climb to the summit of the tower on a clear autumn morning and scan the vast level. It looks like some garden of the Lord, an Eden where burgeons every green herb of the field "whose seed is in itself each after his kind," and surely those silver threads of Ouse and Cam below are like the rivers which went eastward out of the Garden of Eden. I can chatter to you of the great Fen when seated on the Lock gates at Earith; but up here

"Insphered
In regions calm of mild and serene air
Above the smoke and stir of that dim spot
Which men call earth——"

I am dumb, and must see my own visions alone and leave you to see yours.

* * * * *

I make no apology for cutting six very dull miles of my Ouse voyage. I have thoroughly enjoyed my day's holiday and I should have bored my reader a deal more had I struggled through those weeds at Pope's Corner, where the Cam greets Father Ouse and loafs arm in arm with him to Ely City.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PERVERSION OF THE OUSE.

"Here, he exclaims, far from the city's roar,
I fix my dwelling on this muddy shore;
One single neighbour shares this lonely place,
Successful victor o'er the scaly race.
He spreads his nets alike for pike and eels;
Makes laws at pleasure and again repeals.
In wild seclusion hid he lives afloat
With sprit and gun arranged in open boat.
Our host perceives him, hails him as a guest,
Welcomes and deems him worthy of the feast."

—Translation from a Latin Ode on Whittlesey Mere, by Dean
Duport of Peterborough, 1676.

MY reader, if he has travelled so far with me, is probably thinking that the Ouse is growing prosy and tedious. Quite true! I advanced the theory earlier in the book that rivers are very human, very akin to the nature of man, and reminiscent of human life. As we grow old and lose the snap and vim of life we grow prosy and we live mainly in the past and tend to senile anecdote. So with the Ouse, as the clouds of old age gather he too has lost interest in the present, begins to live only in the past and to grow melancholy and to brood over the errors and mistakes of life, wherein he has been the victim of other people's wayward perversity. And here in this chapter I propose to tell his first great grievance. If you chance to look out of the window as you travel by the Great Eastern from Ely to Lynn, you will get a brief glance of a willow-lined reach of the Ouse just outside Ely, and then the river vanishes behind a fen dyke, beneath which the river runs parallel with the railway as far as Littleport. This cut carries the Ouse six miles direct to Littleport. This is the practice course of the Cambridge Varsity Boat. Wells' map of the Fen, 1829, shows that the Ouse, prior to that date, straggled in a tortuous course southwards into the Fen, as if unwilling to get to the sea at Lynn earlier than need be, and reached Littleport in a course of some fourteen miles. Such dilatory loitering could not be tolerated, so Sandells Cut quickens the course of the Ouse to Littleport. Hence as this chapter will show practically the whole course of the Ouse from Ely to Brandon Creek is artificial.

We pass on our right near Prick-willow the mouth of the river Lark flowing down from Bury St. Edmunds through Mildenhall, with Isleham hard by, once a great resort for Fen smugglers; for smuggling of Hollands, rum and "strip" (tobacco) was once a very profitable calling and I should surmise, on the vast net-work of streams and lagoons, it was a softer job for the smuggler than anywhere in England. I am not sure that it is not still. The Fenman needed something to mix with the unpleasant and unwholesome water of his peat wells to "wet his whistle," and he took care to get it cheap and mix it strong, and Isleham was a great place for such bargains.

To beguile the tedium of the way I tell C.B. how his great grandfather, the Rev. Charles Frederick Baylay, Rector of Kirby on Bain, from 1846 to 1890,

once voyaged this way. When an undergrad at Trinity, Cambridge, in 1827 he was stroke of a crew in an eight oar wherry from Cambridge to Lynn, whence they rowed the twenty miles across the Wash to Boston, sea water which can be rough sometimes, but on this occasion the day was fine and the water smooth. "Fenland Notes and Queries" gives an account of this voyage:—"The crew proceeded by the Witham to Tattershall and arrived at Lincoln on the 21st April, 1827, the day Bishop Kaye was installed. Nine stalwart worthies, in full boating costume, attending Divine Service in the Cathedral, astonished the sober-minded citizens of Lincoln, as much as if a canoe of Sandwich Islanders had landed in their city." Mr. Baylay was stroke, John Mitchell Kemble and Kenelm Digby were in the crew and also Mr. A. T. Malkin of Wimpole Street, London. The latter gentleman wrote the "Times," on the 4th August, 1885, inviting other members of the party to communicate with him. As Mr. Baylay was the only one who responded it was concluded that these were the only survivors of the adventurous voyage. Mr. Malkin in his letter says—"We took a pilot on board from Lynn to Boston but were not nursed by a steamer nor padded with cork." All came fresh into Boston. On the 22nd after a paddle round Brayfoot Water greatly to the gratification of the citizens who admired the boat and greatly applauded the crew, they commenced their return voyage, again putting up at Tattershall for the night, and arriving at Boston on Monday morning the 23rd. On Tuesday they put to sea, but encountered rough water and were in some danger as their boat endeavoured to go through the waves instead of riding over them; they had to back into smooth water before they could swing the boat, and returning to Boston, sent their vessel on a waggon with three post horses to Wisbeach, the crew going on foot." An account of this remarkable rowing feat is given in the "Lincoln and Lincolnshire Cabinet," 1828.

The memory of this voyage was revived in the letter to the "Times" on the 4th August, 1885, no doubt by the following incident. I had just come down from Oxford in 1885 and was invited to make one of an eight to row from Dover to Calais, but was unable to go. The attempt was made and excited much public interest at the time. It failed and, if I remember rightly, the boat was swamped midway in the Channel and had it not been nursed by a steamer, some of the crew, being exhausted, would have been drowned. No doubt the wherry of 1827 was a more substantial craft than the eight which attempted the Channel, but in any case it was a notable boating feat.

But here we are at Littleport, and here the story of the first great misfortune which overtook the Ouse, within historic times, begins.

Badesdale, to whose learned work on the navigation of the Port of King's Lynn I have referred, begins his book as follows:—

"In former Ages the Chanel of Lenne-haven (as by good Records appeareth) was not above six Poles broad. The Ousa Parva (alias Brandon) and Stoke Waters only had their Influx into the Sea by Lenne; which Waters when united a little above Salters Load (about sixteen Miles from Lenne) passed through a narrow River, then called Wiggenhale Eea. But the Outfall by Wisbech decaying for Causes hereafter assigned, the Waters of Great Ouse were let fall into Ouse Parva by a new River made from Littleport Chair to Rebeck, its former Course being from Littleport by Welney and Welle to the North Sea by Wisbech. But now its Course being through this new Cut and joining to Ouse Parva and Stoke Waters, they all passed with united Force to Lenne."

This statement requires interpretation. If you follow me on the map, originally (no date is on record, but it may be assumed as prior to the reign of

Edward I.) the Ouse ran north-east by what is called the Welney River, now a mere wraith of a stream, joined the Old River Nene at Upwell, and thence under the name of the Welle Creek reached Wisbech, a once important seaport. Wisbech is, of course, nothing but "Ouse Beck," or Ousebeach, its old name, the mouth of the Ouse, and this was the mouth of the Ouse as nature formed it, and intended it to remain, if human perversity had not interfered. It was in the Welle Creek King John lost his baggage and crown jewels, not in the Wash, as school histories give it, for no one, even that fatuous monarch, would have been fool enough to drive waggons across the twenty miles of treacherous Wash sands.

Now I imagine this Welney river once had a nasty habit, common to Fen rivers, of occasionally flowing the wrong way when over-ridden by the waters of the Nene. Like a motor car starting to run backwards down hill of its own accord, a river behaving in this eccentric manner must have caused a good deal of inconvenience. Hence it entered the mind of a certain Bishop to checkmate this obstreperous river by initiating an ingenious but somewhat fatal piece of engineering. History has not preserved his name, nor the "circa" when he flourished; possibly he was not a Bishop at all. Kingsley says he was a Bishop, though I cannot trace his authority for this, and then Kingsley did not like Bishops, at least pre-Reformation Bishops. As in my school days at Bedford, any mischief perpetrated thereabouts was set down by common consent to "them there Grammar School boys," so in mediæval times anything particularly annoying was usually ascribed to a Bishop. Now coming out of Norfolk and Suffolk, of which its course forms the county boundary, you will note the Little Ouse or Brandon Creek (with which my next chapter deals) flowing into the Ouse a few miles on beyond Littleport.

The good Bishop hit on a plan of cutting a passage from the Ouse at Littleport to the Little Ouse (Littleport-Chair to Rebeck). The map will clarify my meaning, *i.e.*, the river between Littleport and the Brandon Creek is an artificial cutting made by the Bishop's directions. Whereupon the Ouse, deserting its old course to Wisbech, turned down this cutting and flowed to King's Lynn, the original embouchure of the Little Ouse alone. Now the result was disastrous. The Great Ouse drains some two thousand seven hundred square miles, and the Little Ouse possibly two hundred square miles, while the Old Nene River, unwilling to part company with its old companion, began to flow Lynnwards also, so that some sixteen times greater volume of water flowed Lynnwards than nature had arranged for. Added to all this, Fenmen had for ages delved ditches and drains to take this water towards Wisbech. Now if a householder in a misguided moment decides to divert the main drain of his house and take it out another side of his house for a change, and forgets also to re-arrange his internal pipes accordingly, a mess will ensue. So it befell in the Fen. I imagine the good Bishop, when he saw the result of his scheme, "vamoosed" from the wrath of his neighbours, and became a Bishop "*in partibus*." For streams began to flow back to their sources. Wisbech saw its harbour run dry and its ships left to rot upon the mud, while Lynn, visited by a continuous deluge, subsided in slices into the torrent, and disastrous floods submerged the Fen. The whole matter is told at great length in Dugdale's "History of the Fen"; and many ancient authorities were quoted in a long law suit in 1617 before Sir Henry Hobart, Lord Chief Justice.

The Marshlanders in 1294 presented "a grievous complaint" to Edward

I. to have the waters of Welle, viz. Ouse, which anciently had their outfall at Wisbech, brought back "*in debitum et antiquum cursum*." The people of Lynn made dolorous complaints, for the Roman banks of the estuary were swept away. In 1362 "they made 'doleful petition' that the river which originally was twelve perches in breadth was now a full mile wide; Old Lynn Church was washed away with many houses, and much land subsided into the flood. Had the river been properly embanked the current would have scoured the channel and made Lynn a good and permanent port. The river, however, was left to wander and spend its force in widening its course, until the current grew feeble, and finally the resistless tides gained the upper hand and the channel began to silt up. The result was devastating floods, and Marshland gradually deteriorated until the time of the Stuarts, when schemes of drainage more or less successful were initiated. The river was never properly banked and trained until the engineer Rennie cut the Eau Brink Canal in 1827, thus avoiding the great horse shoe bend of the river near Lynn, and carrying its waters direct to Lynn.

Now, as you can imagine, a perverted and dissolute river like this made a vast slop, and periodically drowned many thousands of acres, while the sea from time to time surged inland many miles.

How has all this dismal swamp been changed into the garden of the Lord as one sees it to-day, despite the insuperable problems of small slope and silting up river? The work has been done, as all work in this world is done, not as well as it should have been done, but at least done. Probably the ubiquitous Roman, who built the Akeman Road across the Fen, began the task with the building of long sea walls along the coasts of Lincolnshire and the Wash; Walpole, Walsoken, Waldersee, etc., perpetuate by their names the memory of this work. They also cut a catch water along the edge of the Highlands as the Carr Dyke, from the Glen to the Witham. The Monks of Ely, Peterborough, Crowland, and Ramsey continued the work. They aimed not at *draining* the Fen—it has never been *drained* to this day, but at preventing inundation. And between the two there is a great difference. If you have in your house a fixed bath and all appliances thereto, when your ablutions are done you pull up the plug and away the water goes. But if you are reduced to a hip bath your unfortunate domestic empties it as best she can, tilts it into a pail, slopping the carpet meanwhile, and finally mops up the rest. The Fen has been mopped up by pumping stations and wind mills, not drained. The monks were not very successful, and with the best of intentions they could not well be so, because they were ignorant of some very abstruse laws of mathematics, as governing the flow of water, some of which have been ignored to this day. The Fen history is a record of colossal mistakes, which have cost uncounted thousands of money. Roughly speaking every man endeavoured to get rid of the water round him by passing it on to his neighbour, who thus received a double allowance, and to this end the Fenman would dam up streams, cut drains, and make banks which saved himself at the expense of somebody else. If you put your finger over a pipe nozzle you squirt the water violently over somebody else, and the somebody else is naturally annoyed, hence probably the somewhat surly and suspicious nature of the Fenmen. You have seen one of these well-intentioned but misguided persons at work at Littleport, with rivers running backwards, and the whole country in a deplorable mess. Apparently all landowners were made responsible for the repair of dykes and severely punished for neglect. Fen tradition has it that a sort of Lynch Law

prevailed, and culprits were built up and left, like the tribe of Dan, "to abide in their breaches," and summary justice awaited "Fen Tigers,* who cut dykes to draw the water from their own land to their neighbour's." No systematic effort to improve the Fen and reduce it to "winterlands," as well as "summerlands," was made until the 17th century, mainly under the "Adventurers," advised by Cornelius Vermuyden, to whom I have referred, whose story I will tell in brief when we reach our bourne at Denver Sluice, for there only can I explain what they did and what they failed to do, so far as taming this unruly stream of Ouse.

Meanwhile, through long centuries the Fen "tigers," "slodgers," "yellow bellies," "buzzards," and "camels," were well content to "dagg" for pike and eels, shoot wild fowl, house what crops grew on "summerlands," and live a self-sufficient life of freedom and of cheapness, for which floods and fogs and agues were reckoned a small price to pay. Long and bitter was their opposition, as my last chapter will tell, to the schemes of reclamation. Had you and I lived beside Whittlesea Mere or Soham Mere, and known their summer beauties, their sports, regattas, yachting, and their joyous skating matches or ice boat races in winter, I think we should have been recalcitrant Fenmen.

Charles Kingsley knew them, and has left a vignette of Whittlesea Mere :

"What a grand place, even twenty years ago, was that Holme and Wittlesea, which is now but a black, unsightly, steaming flat, from which the meres and reed-beds of the old world are gone, while the corn and roots of the new world have not as yet taken their place.

"But grand enough it was, that black ugly place, when backed by Caistor Hanglands and Holme Wood, and the patches of the primæval forest; while dark-green alders, and pale-green reeds, stretched for miles round the broad lagoon, where the coot clanked, and the bittern boomed, and the sedgebird, not content with its own sweet song, mocked the notes of all the birds around; while high overhead hung, motionless, hawk beyond hawk, buzzard beyond buzzard, kite beyond kite, as far as eye could see. Far off upon the silver mere, would rise a puff of smoke from a punt, invisible from its flatness and its white paint. Then down the wind came the boom of the great stanchion-gun; and after that sound another sound, louder as it neared, a cry as of all the bells of Cambridge and all the hounds of Cottesmere, and overhead rushed and whirled the skein of terrified wild-fowl, screaming, piping, cracking, croaking, filling the air with the hoarse rattle of their wings, while clear above all sounded the wild whistle of the curlew, and the trumpet note of the great wild swan. They are all gone now."

I think we should have viewed with dismay the substitution of potato patches and a revolution of the whole scheme of life as pursued for untold centuries. It was to invite frogs to live on the tops of mountains and bulrushes to grow in London streets, and to say they liked it. And to add to it all the "Adventurers" claimed as private property, as well they might do considering their huge expenditure, vast tracts of what had been common lands or waters, as the case might be, in return for their by no means successful schemes of drainage. The Fenmen found themselves heavily taxed for the same, called on for rents and tithes which they had never known, and bread grew dear and wages

* The origin of the phrase, "Fen tigers," is unknown. They were the larger farmers, many of whom profited by the financial embarrassments of the "Adventurers," to buy up their holdings cheaply, and amassed much money in consequence. "Slodgers" were small holders. "Yellow bellies" was a generic name for Fenmen, derived from frogs, as "camel," was from the fen custom of stilts.

sank to 11/- a week. No wonder they grumbled, damaged the new dykes and raised riots. It was of course a process of evolution, akin to the Enclosures Act and the introduction of machinery, and as old Caspar moralised : —

“ But then you know such things must be
With every famous victory.”

There must always be an illstarred generation when great changes impend, who see the habits of their lifetime changed, who are driven to new and unwelcome forms of labour and who sigh for the good old days which are gone. One still sees occasionally in Fen cottages the “gleve” or eel spear which was used for “dagging” pike and eels, the “sketches” or stilts and the old-fashioned bone pattens or skates. Of course it is right that the potatoes should grow where the bulrush flourished. Still, looking over Wicken Fen, one may be pardoned a sigh over that last scrap of the great lone Fenland and feel some sympathy with the Marshlander and the Fenman of former days.

Another day's journey will bring me to Denver Sluice, where I will speak my last screed upon the Fenland of the Ouse. Meanwhile I purpose in the next chapter to give an account of a voyage up the Little Ouse, whose mouth we shall soon pass, of which much has been said, as being by far the most picturesque and interesting tributary of the Ouse, if only to break the monotony of my discourse on dykes and leames and lodes of which I earlier gave warning.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TRIBUTARY OF THE OUSE. THE LITTLE OUSE.

"Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
Gentle and brown above the pool?
And laughs the immortal river still
Under the mill, under the mill?
Say, is there Beauty yet to find
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies and truths and pains? Oh! yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?"

—RUPERT BROOKS, *The Old Vicarage, Granchester.*

I HAVE voyaged a good many hundred miles on all parts of the Ouse and some of its tributaries. Now and again in Fenland, talking to boatmen or bargees or chatting to yokels on the bank, I struck track of a tradition that some bold navigator had once made his way from Bedford to the Norfolk Broads viâ the Little Ouse and the Waveney, that these two rivers flowed from the same source, the waters flowing impartially, according to season and circumstances, either way, by the Little Ouse to the Great Ouse beyond Littleport or by the Waveney to Breydon Water and Yarmouth. The story somewhat resembled that of the sea serpent. I got no further than the somebody who had heard that somebody said that somebody had made the voyage. I had twice before voyaged this most interesting tributary, the Little Ouse, to its last navigable point—Thetford. I resolved to utilize a brief holiday from war work in the Admiralty in June 1917, in testing the legend and attempting the feat if it were to be done; in which case I should establish the fact that Norfolk was an island, which in fact it is within a few feet.

Spede asserts that "Norfolke is an Iland closed on the south part with the waters of Waveney and lesser Ouse which divide it from Suffolke." He, in his enthusiastic admiration for Norfolk, in which I heartily concur, composes a Latin quatrain in its praise, one line of which runs "*Hinc fluvius illinc Insula clausa mari.*" Ancient maps unflinchingly mark the Ouse and the Waveney as one, a really remarkable physical feature as presenting a species of two-headed river. Modern maps venture as near as they dare but end in nervous wriggles when it comes to the point of announcing such an extraordinary phenomenon of river life. Possibly, as I have discussed on page 3 in connection with the Claydon Brook and the Cherwell, these two rivers are battling for mastery of the watershed. If Father Ouse possesses a son of such abnormal eccentricity I must make his better acquaintance. Hence one fine day in June, 1917, a party of three, my brother Captain Percy Farrar, C.B., and myself start from Littleport whither a Canadian Canoe for three, cooking utensils, etc., for provender for man and beast is to seek in the Fen, had preceded us.

Littleport is famed as a centre of fen skating and keeps memory of Tom-line, Green, Dyer, "Turkey" and "Fish" Smart, "Gutta Percha" and many another noted fast skater, or "pattener" and a frost starts great fen skating matches hereabouts and competitors try conclusions with their rivals in Holland. It is difficult to get accurate records of speed before stop watches were invented. Turkey Smart was backed to skate a mile in two minutes and frequently tried, but his best record was 2 minutes 2 seconds. The names of Littleport and Brandon Creek, the Fen alias for the Little Ouse, are reminiscent of the days when they were a real "port" and a "creek"; when the Fen, swept by in-flowing tides meeting the down flowing Ouse, was a land of wide lagoons where vast beds of reeds and in summer tracts of *pré salé* stretched to the horizon, haunt of fish and fowl, through which meandered the stream of Ouse bearing "ketches" of fifty tons burden. The Little Ouse was then a real creek or kloof, coming down from the highlands of Brandon and Thetford, as reference to the map of the Fen (page 161) shows.

We paddle along the eight miles of that fatal cutting from "Littleport Chair to Rebech where Ouse Parva or Brandon Water falleth in" of which my last chapter tells. We turn at last into the mouth of the Little Ouse—the route of William the Conqueror's first unsuccessful raid upon Ely. Though a short river, probably some 45 or 50 miles in length, in flood time it comes down suddenly with great force and entering the Ouse at a bad angle its waters are apt to be over-ridden by the greater stream of the Ouse with disastrous effects, and corresponding expense to the Board of the Bedford Level.

As our canoe headed up Brandon Creek we had ocular proof of this, for we met discoloured water and many dead fish. We reached the spot where the dyke had burst and bankers and gaulchers were toiling to close the breach by sinking barges of cement. Climbing the dyke we saw a vast lake stretching to the distant horizon, with half submerged homesteads dotting the surface. The burst occurred sometime in 1915 when some 40,000 acres of Southery Fen went under eight feet of water, and now in 1917 with incessant pumping, which caused the discoloured water and dead fish (the latter due probably to chemical manures) the flood had been reduced to about three feet in depth. Had it occurred at any other than war time a Mansion House Fund would no doubt have been opened. It gave one an idea of the incredible sufferings of bygone Fenmen when defeated in their ceaseless battle with tide and river. I will not weary my reader with the description of the twenty miles to Brandon. Suffice it that the river was one of those once busy carriers of merchandise, now forsaken and again the haunt of innumerable river fowl. As we slowly draw away from the embanked lower river and uplands begin to show over the meadows, I vary the monotony of the paddle by reflecting that we are penetrating a really classic valley, pre-eminently the home of neolithic man whose stone implements are found broadcast on the uplands of Brandon and Thetford. The hard black flint with which the soil abounds accounts for the abundance of stone implements in the area, which was no doubt the "black country" of neolithic England. Near Brandon, in a wood, are some 250 depressions called "Grimes Graves," the neolithic flint mines. The word "Grime" or "Grim" seems to be synonymous with Goblin or Devil, and probably as some more civilized race began to impinge on neolithic men, the latter emerging earth begrimed from their flint pits, suggested goblins of darkness. I was once fortunate enough to visit the site when one of these depressions had been cleared, leaving a circular precipitous hole about forty feet across by forty feet deep from which were

driven galleries into the flint-laden soil. It is estimated these pits were worked for some twenty thousand years during which the local tribes were in the neolithic stage. Through the vicissitudes of countless centuries this unique and archaic trade has continued and the flint "knapper" or "flaker" still works at his ancient craft. The making of "strike a lights" succeeded the original trade; then the purveying of gun flints to the British Army until Waterloo, a period of great prosperity. The East India Company had a factory at Brandon which supplied India and the Orient, while the Brandon Gun Flint Company supplied the British Army, when a knapper would earn his £10 a week. Even to-day the knapper makes large quantities of gun flints for export to tribes in damp climates using old flint lock guns and I know one firm which deals largely in such goods with Brandon. In the South African War quantities of flints were exported to replace matches to the damper districts of South Africa. As a by-trade the knapper flakes and polishes spurious specimens of arrow heads, etc., for educational museums, which only a skilled expert can distinguish from genuine neolithic work. The pits of Brandon and of Cissbury in Sussex tell the tale of a community permanently and prosperously engaged in the flint mining industry and trading implements. Allcroft (British Earthworks), speaking of these pits, says that neolithic man had already learned not only that the freshly dug flint is more tractable to the hammer than that which has been weathered by exposure on the surface, but that certain kinds of dug flint were more suitable than others and that no other centres in England appear to have afforded so valued a stone as Brandon and Cissbury, which evidently by the immense area of these mines reached a pitch of prosperity. It is noteworthy that the Icknield Way, running north-east from the Thames at Wallingford, ends near Brandon and was probably the route of trade thence to the valley of the Thames and to Stonehenge.

For a naturalist this river is a still more interesting voyage, for as one clears the Fenland, one reaches a wild unpopulated moorland where for 42 square miles only one village, Elveden, exists. This great stretch of sandy heath and warren, largely clad with heather and pinewood, is called the "Breckland." Its utter loneliness caused it to be selected in 1916 as the site of the first full-scale experiments in the use of tanks, and the tracks of the great machines can still be seen on all sides. Innumerable rabbits give a trade to the district in pelts for silk hats, glue and size. The whole country suggests the Stone Age, as tumuli afford the principal breaks to a skyline fringed with stunted pines, and flint implements are almost as common on the ground as are the rabbits.

The war drove skilled agriculturists to try to cultivate large patches of this desolate country, hitherto considered useless owing to the pest of rabbits. However, it has been discovered that by wire netting leaving about eighteen inches of wire pegged down to the ground on the outer side the rabbit can be excluded. Being a brainless animal, when he butts against the wire, he starts to burrow under but comes upon the flat wire. He has not sense enough, which a rat has, to retreat eighteen inches and take the wire at its edge.

The most remarkable feature in the river course here is the occurrence of birds, sedges, grasses and many insects usually associated with the sea coast, and telling of its original semi-marine character. As the Fen was the last refuge of the last of the English so this valley is the last refuge of species which become rarer. Here the great bustard was last known in 1820, while stock-doves, nightjars and green woodpeckers are common birds. Thetfordians assert that within a six mile radius 195 species of birds have been identified,

of which 103 have been known to breed in the district. A bird now almost entirely confined to this area is the stone curlew. It is an occasional visitor, generally when migrating, to most other counties, and it breeds sparingly in Wiltshire and on the Sussex Downs, but its true home is in Breckland. In reality, it is not a member of the curlew family, but it is a long-legged, brown-coloured representative of the plover tribe about twice the size of a peewit. Natural history books describe them as "crepuscular," which means that they are more seen after sunset and during the ensuing hours of darkness. Certainly they are loth to take to the wing in the day time, and when disturbed will run for hundreds of yards with head and wings outstretched; but, once it is dusk, groups of curlew can be heard uttering their melancholy and penetrating cries as they fly overhead to the water-meadows and marshes where their nightly meal of frogs, slugs, and worms awaits them. Many a visitor has tried to find the eggs of the curlew here in May, but it is a task that calls for both local knowledge and extreme patience. Let the aspiring collector of peewits' eggs imagine himself, not in a pleasant meadow, with the knowledge conveyed by the screaming birds overhead that he has only to perambulate it a few times before coming upon the nest he seeks, but let him rather picture himself upon a seemingly limitless plain, with a broiling sun above, and under his feet the sandy soil covered with flint stones of every conceivable size and shape, the only relief being occasioned by the presence of innumerable rabbit holes for him to stumble into. If, after progressing thus for a considerable time, he does see a curlew it will be but a momentary glimpse that is offered him of one running at right angles to his course some quarter of a mile away. Even then he has no knowledge if there is a nest within hundreds of yards from where he first saw the bird.

After a night spent at the delightful riverside Swan Inn at Brandon, a great haunt for roach fishers and artists, we proposed an easy paddle next day up the charming nine-mile reach to Thetford, of which I need say little. The first village, Santon Downham, a picturesque cluster of houses nestling at the foot of a pine clad hill, I mention, because of an unusual experience in the past. It was, three hundred years ago, completely buried by a sand storm and drift off the Lakenheath hills, and hence I suppose they take care to keep the dense woods behind them. Here begins a peculiar kind of hand wheel staunch, single-gated, working like a guillotine, hauled up by ropes over a tread wheel. When shut they accumulate vast drifts of weeds above them, so that portorage is the wisest course. Thence the river runs along the borders of the desolate but beautiful moor, with vast stretches of bracken and clumps of pine, alive with rabbits, and the stream with flocks of ducks.

By the way, I have spoken of the difficulty of measuring river distances. It is more than useless to enquire of natives on the bank how far a place is by river, because they never know. If they say five miles be sure it is nearer ten. You do not ask how many miles to the top of Mont Blanc. It is so many hours (stunde) to an ordinary average climber. Water mileage is still more complicated because few or any of your informants have travelled it, and whether by barge or skiff adds to the problem. Hence always exaggerate the biggest liar you meet a hundred per cent. and you strike a rough average of the truth, and I may here add that the people who haunt the banks of rivers, be they fishermen, loafers, boaters, bathers, outvie the Cretans in my experience. Rivers are infectious of mendacity. Only the prophylactic of early training "hanging

about me, and giving me checks," as poor Walter Raleigh said upon the scaffold, has, I hope, kept me immune from the taint.

Finally, we make Thetford, the *ultima Thule*, after which exploration was to begin, a charming, old-world town, once in Saxon times a place of importance. Everyone must, of course, visit the great mound, the Castle Hill, eighty feet high, and one thousand feet in circumference at the base, and surrounded by great earthworks, Norman, no doubt, and probably erected at the time of the Conqueror's attack *viâ* Brandon. Here the Thet joins the Little Ouse. The rivers here meander about in a most surprising medley of water ways, split up in mill races, tunnels, and overshots. Thetfordians were surprisingly ignorant, and nobody could tell which was the Ouse and which the Thet, and all the explanation we got was: "They's County Waters," while no boat to their recollection had ever gone above Thetford. However, next morning, after much study of very imperfect maps, we prepared to start, and as at Brackley an interested but half derisive crowd attended. "We should not get two miles," we were told, "riparian owners would stop us; pubs. were non-existent." But three Englishmen are not to be daunted on the edge of the unknown.

It soon became evident that the river was never intended for boating, as bridge arches were so low as only to be passed by lying flat. The river meandered away southwards into a vast marsh, shut in by dense reeds and rushes, where the paddle was useless, and one had painfully to propel the canoe by grasping and hauling on the reeds, which grew out of bottomless slime. Just in such a place, at Aldreth Causeway, Hereward, at the bidding of Torfreda, trapped the Normans by firing the reeds. One can picture the scene as the first faint curl of smoke reached the Normans hauling through the reeds. The sudden whiff of smoke, the hot wind, and then the crackle of fire told them their certain and awful fate. There was no escape, and no return. To cling to the boat was death by fire, to plunge over was to perish smothered in the treacherous mud. Some modern historians, among them, I regret to say, C. G. Harper ("The Cambridge Road"), relegate this incident of the reeds, along with King Alfred's cakes, the butt of Malmesey wine and such like incidents, to the list of exploded fables, asserting that reeds will not burn. I hate such cold-blooded iconoclasm. It savours of cavilling pernicketyness. How can they know that our forefathers were all liars, and picturesque ones at that? I accept reeds, cakes, and the whole list as authentic, especially the reeds. If one of these captious historians will visit Wicken Fen and ask Mr. Barnes, the keeper, whether Fen reeds are inflammable or not, and if the story of Hereward and the reeds is probable, he may find his doubts solved. At least I advise him not to try a match in Wicken Fen.

At last we suddenly emerge from the reeds into open water to find ourselves below the great façade of Euston Hall, the seat of the Duke of Grafton. There flit before the imagination's eye not a few ghosts of its famous past. Here comes sauntering down the terrace, with his spaniels, to feed the swans, "Old Rowley," Charles II., a frequent visitor to the then owner, the Earl of Arlington, of the Cabal Ministry, whose only daughter married Charles' son, Henry Fitzroy, 1st Duke of Grafton. And there is staid John Evelyn, the Diarist, pottering about with a spade to plant the splendid cedars of Lebanon. For what was probably the happiest days of her life—her widowhood—lived here poor Catharine of Braganza, who, writes her Chaplain, Father Diaz, "lives content here with her familie; the place is very pretty and hass all the con-

veniencys wee can desire, except that there is no cows." And later on a frequent visitor here, and at Elveden, was the greatest and worthiest of all the Stuart scions—a great grandson of Charles II., of the bar sinister line—one may even except the bar—Charles James Fox, come to walk the birds by day and drink his two bottles of port and gamble to daylight, and then be off next morning to Newmarket, where he would dash his cob on to the course, and gallop beside the race, shouting and halloing and panting with exertion. At sight of us he would have rushed down to the bank, to bet us a wager. "Fifty guineas to five, we did not reach the limit of the park within an hour." "A hundred guineas to five we never passed on to the Waveney." "Well, then, what would we bet on?" He would finally have abandoned us in despair as no gentlemen, who were unprepared to book a wager on the chances of so sporting a voyage as ours. I suppose betting is a reprehensible habit. Trevelyan, in his *Life of C. J. Fox*, speaking of his love of betting, so prevalent among his contemporaries, writes: "It was repugnant to their idea of what was becoming and fitting to spend twenty minutes in arguing with and refuting a man who had so little faith in his own views that he would not back it with twenty guineas." If you wanted to advance your opinion on politics, religion, or any conceivable subject, you could do so, but you must be ready to put your cash on the worth of your remarks. I can conceive that betting so employed served an admirable purpose, and that our forefathers "stopped the mouths of lions," who would otherwise have roared intolerably at dinner tables and in clubs, and in these days do so unchecked. Brooks' Club still possesses the betting book, which records many of Fox's bets on every conceivable contingency. One entry runs thus: "Lord Bolingbroke bets Mr. Fox a guinea and is to receive 1,000 guineas whenever the public debt of this country amounts to £170,000,000." One can but sigh for those spacious days, as one groans over 6s. in the £ income tax. Another constant visitor to Euston was the notorious "Old Q," the Duke of Queensberry.

Lo not conceive that I have wildly digressed from the Ouse. I have but sought to beguile my attention from the struggle against the forces of nature which here begin to face us. Euston would be a wise limit to the faint-hearted voyager if he ever gets so far, for we advanced to meet every conceivable obstacle to progress, fallen trees after the great storm, plank bridges, floating masses of weeds, and what most surprised me, dense jungles of hemlock, which I always supposed was a land plant, growing from the bed of the river with gnarled stalks as thick as your wrist. Here are vast trackless swamps, under water in winter, in summer a riot of luxurious growth. Flaming yellow irises, lilac-tinged valerian, the white blossom of the water crowfoot, purple and yellow loose-strife, forget-me-nots, lilies, meadow sweet, and strange flowers I had never seen, and which probably are not to be seen save in this lone land. Once the river dived under a gloomy arcade of willows and poplars, while overhanging bushes, shutting out the light, dipped their fronds into the stagnant inky water. It might have been a backwater of a tropical Congo. As we rested on our paddles nothing broke the dead silence of this eerie place. A half-submerged tree trunk ahead seemed to take shape of an alligator, and one could almost see the glint of his watching eye. Was he awaiting us or watching for some antelope coming down to drink? Almost one expected the rush of the great saurian, and then the honk of a swan overhead and the scutter of a duck beyond us gave one almost a start. And then out again into shallow sedgy pools, the undisturbed haunt of heron and duck, and aggressive swans, who had at

times to be scared off by the paddle as they disputed our way. I felt like the sailors in the "Ancient Mariner,"

"We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea."

Villages or dwellings were rarely seen, and then well away from the river. A canoe created a sensation equivalent to a hippopotamus. None had seen a craft ever pass, though some yokels with the usual riverine mendacity declared that many years ago men had rowed from Yarmouth to King's Lynn for a bet. One oft-repeated tale told of two young men who put their boat on roller wheels at Diss and wheeled it to Thetford, a feat so Spartan and improbable that it was probably true on the principle of Herodotus's report of a voyage round the Cape. Towards the end of the day the canoe emerged from a ditch-like brook into a great shallow expanse of water whose surface was covered like a tessellated pavement with pink, yellow, and white lilies, such as are rarely now found on Ouse reaches—the lake of Riddlesworth Hall, whose facade broke on us as a sudden surprise in this lone land. The river beyond shrank to the size of the King's Ditch, too shallow to float our canoe loaded with three, so there was nothing for it but to leave one to steer while the other two towed, throwing the rope backwards and forwards between Norfolk and Suffolk as obstacles occurred. But, alas, here the riparian owners carried their fences right athwart the stream, and, after futile struggles, we grounded finally in a dry ditch under cover of thorns and fallen trees in sight of the village of Hopton. We had failed, and had proved that riverside gossips were not all liars. Next day saw canoe and crew ignominiously riding in a farm cart. We skirted a great brown stretch across the landscape to the south, Lopham Marsh, and there at last, in a willow-fringed pool we found the cradle of the Little Ouse and the Waveney, each trickling away, the one east and the other west, divided by what appeared to be an artificially raised pathway. So, perhaps, after all Spede is right, and Norfolk was in his day an island, as it nearly is now.

We learnt from the inhabitants that in winter Lopham Marsh is an inland sea, when, of course, the voyage might be possible, but I do not think any sane person would face such obstacles as we had overcome on a winter torrent, save he contemplated suicide.

It is surprising that this short river, I do not think we had come much more than 15 miles from Thetford, perhaps in all forty miles from the mouth, could produce the havoc we had seen in the Fen. I presume it must be fed by deep springs and drain a large surface through porous soil.

The rest of our voyage from Diss, where we re-embarked, down the charming Waveney to the Broad, lies beyond the scope of this book. I tell but one incident of it. We reached next night a very charming village which for the feelings of the inhabitants shall be nameless. The weather had turned damp and chilly, and we sought the comforts of the Inn, but strangely enough there was no hospitality to be had. Mine host would have none of us; his beds, he alleged, were full with fishing visitors, which was obviously a lie, as we had seen none. When we talked of the duty incumbent on hotelkeepers, etc., we were referred to the village policeman, who strolled around outside, showing considerable interest in us, but offering no assistance. We applied to cottages. We would even be content with a hay barn, but these villagers closed their doors. We were finally reduced to paying a yokel an exorbitant sum to drive us to the nearest habitable place, Eye, five miles away, where at

last we found shelter. It suddenly occurred to us that we lay under suspicion of being German spies, or escaping prisoners, and we could scarcely be surprised. We had arrived dirty, unkempt, and hungry, by a route no living man had been known to come by—in June, 1917—*voilà tout!* Next morning the village eyed us dourly as we passed to our canoe, while the policeman hovered in the background, chewing a straw, and evidently debating the question of obtaining a warrant for our arrest from some local Justice Shallow. As we paddled away “nursing our wrath to keep it warm,” I suddenly recollected that all the while I carried in my pocket that which would have reduced host and policemen to grovelling servility—an Admiralty Pass—wherein below my photograph the “Lords of the Admiralty,” commissioned me as an Intelligence Officer of the Admiralty to enter all naval dockyards, arsenals, workshops, ships, territorial waters, inland waterways, and, in fact, wherever the white ensign floated. It was maddening to think I had forgotten such an opportunity of speaking with the enemy in the gate. I would, however, have no more of inhospitable hosts and suspicious policemen. My chance soon came. I suppose news of us had travelled down stream, for we came to a mill where we were confronted by a truculent miller with a thick stick and a snarling dog, who announced “Nubbudy should pass that way.” With official dignity I plucked forth my Pass, and invited him to inspect and identify the features limned thereon and answer, was it I? I then recited in melodramatic tones the wording of the Pass. Now the phrase, “the Lords of the Admiralty,” has a sonorous, imposing roll about it. The War Office has no such fanfare of trumpets. Nobody knows who “the Lords of the Admiralty” are—they sit apart like the Gods on Olympus, and they are a name to conjure by. “Now my man,” said I, “I, an official of the Admiralty, propose to pass down this inland waterway *via* Bungay and Beccles, to inspect and approve the naval defences of such places. If there is a telegraph office handy, I will report your unseemly behaviour to the Lords of the Admiralty. Meanwhile, put down that stick, tie up that brute, get these bags out, and help carry this canoe over, and if then you have three pints of beer handy, a beverage which grows scanty at the Admiralty just now, bring them forth, and half-a-crown is yours, and you will hear no more of the matter.” The effect was magical. The erstwhile truculent one fairly fawned upon us, and we passed on our way triumphant. Possibly, publichouse gossip of these parts now has it that Lord Beatty and two of his staff passed down the Waveney during the war to make sure that the naval defences of Diss and Bungay and Beccles left no possible opening for the German Fleet, and the village policeman adds the last dramatic touch by announcing that he “very nigh took ’em up.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE GATES OF DENVER SLUICE.

"The patient Fenman who endured long time
The various hardships of the watery clime,
Whose slaughtering gun and faithful dog had fed
His wife and little family with bread,
Now holds the plough, turns up the moory soil,
And finds a vast increase rewards his toil.
His fields are cropt with different sorts of grain,
His sheep and oxen graze the cheerful plain,
He sees himself completely happy now,
And calm content sits smiling on his brow."

—*The Life of a Fenman*, by a FEN PARSON.

IT is a deadly dull voyage from Littleport to Denver Sluice, along what is called the "Ten Mile River." Hereabouts the Ouse is a real Fen river, stealing on with current so sluggish that it scarcely seems to move. It makes no ripple on the bank, no lapping among the reeds. There is no smile on its face, no undulation on its bosom. It is a river falling asleep and nearing the coma which precedes its death. It seems to sigh for the good old days before Vermuyden built the Denver Sluice, some eight miles lower down, and shut out the sea tides which once ran far inland up the Stoke River, the Brandon Creek, the Cam, and the Ouse to Earith, and when many a yawl bowled merrily up on the flow, bound for Brandon, Mildenhall, Ely, Cambridge, or St. Ives. Now it is an English Zuyder Zee; its commerce moribund, save for a rare barge, and the folk who still, from habit, dwell under its banks are busy with potatoes and beans and charlock on the rich fields behind the dykes. Here and there house roofs show where little homesteads nestle under the bank, an occasional bargee "public," or a little "Bethel," for churches are to be found only in villages, and these do not exist on the Fen, but only where little knobs of clayland emerge from the great level.

Nothing breaks the monotony of the tedious windings of the stream, save the chimney of a pumping station, a windmill, a rare bridge, or a solitary fisherman who, of course, gives wild estimates of the distance to Denver.

Denver Sluice reminds me of that delightful lyric of my youth, "The House that Jack built," a concatenation of causations. It linked up the rat, the cat, the dog, the cow with the crumpled horn, the maiden all forlorn, etc., while kindly hearted and ingenious souls would, to my childish delight, introduce fresh personalities to the song, which promised to carry it back to the primæval protoplasm. There was no reason why the history of "the House that Jack built" should ever end. It could stretch back to the Creation, but it always ended in the House that Jack built. Similarly with Denver Sluice, it is a microcosm of Fenland history; its story can begin anywhere and end anywhere, or nowhere. It is a sort of Fenland Piccadilly Circus, everybody in history or out of it, sooner or later, hales up there, if you wait long enough. It has always presented a sort of insoluble "Eastern Question." That it ever was built was a colossal blunder, and once built, to unbuild it would be a

catastrophe. It stands as the be-all and end-all of the Ouse and of the drainage of the Great Bedford Level. It is the massive lock that at high tide shuts out the tidal waters from flooding the reclaimed Fen, and at the ebb is opened to let out the accumulated waters of the Ouse and the innumerable drains of the Level. It requires a military guard at any time of public danger or disturbance, for damage to it would involve the ruin of thousands.

There is little doubt, *pace* Kingsley, to whom monasticism and all its works were anathema, that the dissolution of the monasteries led to serious neglect of many Fen works, which the monks planned and maintained, and that the condition of the Fens grew steadily worse after the reign of Henry VIII. To that period belong the work of Archbishop Morton, formerly Bishop of Ely, who cut Morton's Leam between Peterborough and Wisbech. Chief Justice Popham, who, according to Campbell's "Lives of the Lord Chief Justices," was a drinker, gambler, and an amateur highwayman—curious recommendations for the Coif—constructed Popham's Ea. The real story of its reclamation begins with James I. A popular fallacy exists that the South Sea Bubble was the first English fever of speculation. The first attack of it began with the Fens. Various speculators in the early 17th century cast greedy eyes upon this vast tract of derelict no man's land, or no man's water; they saw in it a possible El Dorado, and they approached the British Solomon with dazzling prospects of the royal purse being enriched by some £150,000 per annum in return for certain draining concessions.

Ben Jonson satirised the Fen speculation of his day in a play, "The Devil is an Ass." He introduced on the stage one Meercraft, a starter of bogus companies, one of whose schemes was the drainage of the Fen.

"The thing is for recovering of drowned lands,
Whereof the Crown to have a moiety
If it be owner, else the Crown and owners
To share that moiety and the Recoverers
To enjoy the t'other moiety for their charge."

Carlyle, in "Historical Sketches," dealing with the reign of James I. and Charles I. devotes one, the "Bog of Lindsey," to the Fens, and this phase of speculation. To Carlyle the Fen is "a stagnant land," "grown dropsical," "unpicturesque," "gross," an "expanse of fat mud and quagmire." "Yet," he adds, "a land of some interest to the human soul, as all land is, or may become." A poor consolation this to those who see a peculiar charm and mystery in every epoch of the Fen. He then talks of the Jacobean speculators:

"These enormous Fens ought, in short, to be conquered. What a tract of land to be gained from the mud gods, worth sterling money if you had it. Positively our river Ouse should not be left to run in this way, submerging whole districts; bank him, bulwark him, hold him up by sheer force; and instead of mud and ducks with summer hay, let there be cattle, pastures, and corn. Such is the talk of speculative friends of agriculture; such is the deliberate Public Report which the leading men of those Fen countries, Sir Oliver and Mr. Robert Cromwell,* among others, and after endless columns of speech and inquiring, are now prepared to sign, and will sign, 'at Huntingdon, this tenth of May, 1605.' What speech and argumentative speculation they have had; what personal inspection, ridings singly or in bodies, to and fro, enough probably to go round the globe, shall be left to the reader. Quantities of talk and

* The uncle and the father of the Protector.

vain riding are necessary; an obscure groping round the business, till once you get upon the business. So many vested interests to be conciliated; town navigation along these sleepy rivers, summer rights of pasturage and turf, winter rights of duck-fowling, with net, decoy-duck, and cross-bow. But the draining is decided to be possible. Pump up your leams and lodes, by windmill or otherwise into this uplifted Ouse, if we once had him lifted. It can be done 'without injury to navigation,' say Sir Oliver, Mr. Robert, and fourteen others. They say and affirm that it can be done; but from the potential to the indicative mood there is always such a distance."

It would appear that Carlyle was not very interested in the Fens. He quickly falls back on one "Smelfungus," who discants upon "Neo Catholics, Puseyites, and pluperfect persons," "surgical bellows," "hot cloth friction," and "galvanic apparatus," and suchlike; a veritable literary "Bog of Lindsey," from which the reader painfully extricates himself like Christian from the Slough of Despond, gasping and wondering what it has all been about.

However, little came of the "argumentative speculation," "personal inspection," and "riding to and fro."

James' attention was distracted by the affairs of the Palatinate, and little was done until the reign of Charles I., when a company of "Adventurers," with Francis, the great and good Earl of Bedford, the owner of twenty thousand acres of Thorney, at their head, tendered for the Draining of the Fen. The Commissioners of Sewers drew up an agreement called Lynn Law, on the 13th January, 1630, whereby the Earl and his fellow adventurers were to receive ninety-five thousand acres, whereof Charles I. was to receive twelve thousand acres, as the document quaintly puts it, "of this poor distressed Part of his Country, which can receive no Help and Relief but by his Royal Hand in giving Light to this Law."

One condition of the Lynn Law is worthy of note, because it is one which the Adventurers most flagrantly disregarded, driven to it by muddling engineering.

"Provided always and it is farther ordered, enacted, adjudged, and decreed that the Port and Haven of Kings Lynn shall be preserved, and the Navigation, Passage, and Highways in, upon, and about all and every the Navigable Rivers within the Tract of the Commission. as namely the Rivers of Ouse, Grant, Neane, Welland, and Glean, shall be likewise preserved and no Prejudice, Annoyance, Hurt, or Hindrance be done to them or any of them by any of the Means aforesaid. . . . So that the ancient Navigation, Passages and Highways, may be restored and continued in, upon and about the said Navigable Rivers as heretofore hath been used and accustomed."

The story of the Adventurers is as long and devious as that of the East India Company. The Fen office was burnt in the Great Fire, 1660, and a complete account of their drainage operations can never be written. How they employed Cornelius Vermuyden, the Dutchman, how they got into his hands and were almost ruined by him, how Francis of Bedford had to sell valuable estates to pay his share, how Charles I. dealt meanly with him, and declared himself the Undertaker, annexing the work and rights of the Adventurers, is a long and weary story. The main work of Francis in connection with the Ouse was the digging of the Old Bedford River (see Chapter XXVII). The few works carried out by the royal Undertaker were in the Wisbech area.

"But here," saith Dugdale, "we come to a Period of this excellent

Prince's Design. For he being forced to raise an Army against the Scots in 1638, and continuing the rest of his Life in an unnatural War at home, the Level lay neglected, and the Country complaining they had received no Benefit by the Draining, they entered upon the ninety-five thousand Acres, which had been taken from them." The Fenman did something more than complain, as he saw whole blocks of Fenland, over which he had roamed and shot and fished without let or hindrance, portioned off as "Severals," of the Adventurers. Moonlight parties cut banks, damaged sluices, and threw banking tools into the water. No less a person than Oliver Cromwell, still a St. Ives farmer, headed the opposition, as I have told in Appendix I., and was hailed as "Lord of the Fens" for his efforts "to hold the drayners in suit of law," showing himself of "tempestuous conduct." before a Committee of the House of Commons in 1640.

A graphic picture of this desperate opposition of the Fenner to drainage schemes is told in Manville Fenn's "Dick of the Fen." But the thing was to be. Francis died during the Civil War, and William, his son, afterwards 1st Duke of Bedford, prosecuted his father's work, and in 1649 again began the reclamation of the Fen, which, according to the "Act for Draining the Great Level," was to be finished by October, 1656. Unfortunately, he was again allured by Cornelius Vermuyden, whose plans were disapproved by Westerdike,* Atkins, and various members of the Great Level Corporation, among them my friend, "Collonel Dodgson," who was expelled from the Corporation for his opposition to Vermuyden, whose learned pamphlet I should dearly have liked to quote to the House of Commons Committee in May, 1920.

As I have told in chapter XXVII., Vermuyden dug the Hundred Foot or New River in 1649, erecting the Hermitage Sluice to deflect the Ouse down his new river. In vain it was pointed out to him that conditions of the Fens in Holland and in England were radically different. The former lie below the ordinary sea level, and possess no adequate natural drainage system, whereas the latter are entirely above mean tide, and possess natural drains in the rivers.

John Bavents Westerdike, a noted Dutch engineer, gave the following opinion in 1650: "If the Ouse had been confined to its old channels by strait Banks it had been a far better and cheaper work. And that cut of Bedford river . . . it is a disputable question, notwithstanding all the charges bestowed on the Banks of that River, whether it be not yet the best course to desert it and do the other work." Exactly! it would have been best.† "The obvious

* The late J. H. H. Moxon, LL.M., of Trinity College, Cambridge, was a great authority on the Lower Ouse 40 years ago. He delivered a very interesting lecture to the Bedfordshire Natural History Society, published at Cambridge in 1878. He was a strong opponent of Vermuyden's system. Of Westerdike he says: "I verily believe he had a much better idea of English Fen draining than his rival." . . . "Those Adventurers only availed themselves of principles of drainage that prevailed in Holland. They cut numberless straight eas and drains, excluded the sea by sluices, and left the outfall to look after itself. The water from the fields was to have run into the drains by means of dykes, in the natural way. By degrees, however, as the land became drained, it sank to a level below that of the rivers which had been cut by the Adventurers, and thus came to an untimely end the efforts of the Dutch drainers." I met Mr. Moxon once at the Hermitage, Earith. He was a continuous voyager on the Fen waterways, and was, I believe, accidentally drowned in the Ouse. His pamphlet bears the inscription, "Chas. E. B. Gillions, from his friend J. H. H. M., which will wake Old Bedfordian memories.

† A friend, learned in the Fen History—his father was Engineer for many years of the Bedford Level, etc.—believes that if the Hundred Foot had been conveyed direct to the sea by a separate mouth, instead of reuniting with the Ouse at Denver, all would have been well.

method of draining the Fens," says Skertchley, "is to embank and clean the river, and to improve the outfalls, and to make the interior drainage subservient to nature." So divided were the Adventurers themselves between Vermuyden's scheme and that of Westerdike and his party, that a majority of one vote alone carried Vermuyden's plans.

The object of the Hundred Foot River, viz., to convey the highland water more directly to the sea, seemed reasonable, but the result was unforeseen. It was found necessary in 1651 to construct Denver Sluice, because the bed of the new river being eight feet higher than that of the old Ouse, the flood waters turned up the Ouse—the present Ten Mile River—instead of going seaward, and drowned the whole Level.

The Corporation of Lynn, of Brandon and Thetford, and the University and Corporation of Cambridge addressed frantic appeals to Parliament against the erection of Denver Sluice, as threatening to interrupt their Navigation, as it actually did, but all in vain. Denver Sluice was built in 1651, to patch up the original blunder of the Hundred Foot. Navigation was most seriously impeded, vessels being sunk in the Sluice, while sometimes for a week the Sluice gates above could not be opened against the current of the Ouse. I gather, however, from a pamphlet, "*Cantabrigia Depicta*," 1763, that at that date heavy freights of all kinds still went to Cambridge *viâ* the Ouse and Cam.

As a last resort Lynn appealed direct to Oliver Cromwell, the Protector. The erstwhile "Lord of the Fens," who had declaimed against "drayners," had championed the rights of Fenmen, and been of "clamorous conduct" on their behalf, would surely now afford a "very present help in time of trouble."* But Whitehall was not St. Ives, any more than is Downing Street, Limehouse; their respective atmospheres are different. The Protector's reply is interesting.

GENTLEMEN,

I received yours, and cannot but let you know the good Resentments I have of your Respects; assuring you that I shall always be ready to manifest a tender Love and Care of you and your Welfare and in particular of that Concernment of yours relating to Navigation. Commending you to the Grace of God, I remain,

Your loving Friend,

OLIVER, PROTECTOR.

Whitehall, 30th Jan., 1653.

Such official replies are familiar to every generation and always elicit the wrath of the recipients. The unctuous piety of the above epistle must have been particularly exasperating. Nothing was done, the navigation continuously deteriorated while indescribable confusion followed. The waters of the Old Welney and Croft rivers overridden by the Hundred Foot were forced backwards and

* Carlyle makes a very poor effort to explain Cromwell's early attitude towards the drainers, of which I speak in Appendix I. He conveniently declines to "disentangle that affair from the dark rubbishy abysses, old and new, in which it lies deep buried; suffice it to assure the reader that Oliver did by no means oppose the draining of the Fens, but was, and had been—as his Father before him—highly favourable to it; that he opposed the King in Council wishing to do a public injustice in regard to the draining of the Fen." This is pushing hero-worship too far, for there is no evidence for such a view, and much to show that Cromwell in his early days headed the Fenmen in opposing the drainage schemes of the Adventurers—root and branch.

drowned large areas, while the Ouse above Denver Sluice silted up so badly that in 1695 "grass and fodder were cut below Ely where boats and barges used to pass."

Lynn made one more effort and presented a Bill in Parliament for the removal of the Hermitage and Denver Sluices as an infringement of the original Lynn Law. The Bill was supported by the University and Corporation of Cambridge, Stoke, Brandon, Mildenhall, Thetford, Bury St. Edmunds, land-owners of Marshland and of the South Level, and townships bordering the South Level; while the Cathedral of Ely and the county and town of Huntingdon alone opposed the Bill. But the influence of the Adventurers was too great and the Bill was rejected.

I have said nothing of the other drainage works carried out by the "Adventurers," but confined myself to those of the Ouse. They faced many difficulties, want of money, shortness of labour and internal discords. The scheme was only kept from going to ruin by the tact, unwearied attention, perseverance and generosity of William, Earl of Bedford "who had acquired not only a complete knowledge of the subject but also a habit of conducting the business of the company and of amalgamating the discordant materials of which the meetings of the participants were composed." The Earl not only paid his own calls in advance but joined in giving security for money borrowed and made advances to other participants to enable them to pay up their calls.

Finally a Commission, appointed by Act of Parliament, on the 26th March, 1653 (four years after the second commencement of the work by William and twenty-three years after the first beginning by Francis) adjudicated the work to be finished. The instrument of adjudication was handed to the Earl of Bedford at Ely, who "received the document kneeling" and upon rising requested the Lord Commissioners to give their presence at a solemn thanksgiving to be held in the Cathedral of Ely, which was attended by a vast concourse of people (W. H. Wheeler, "Reclaimers of the Fen.") The Adventurers had done their best but despite Commissioners, instrument of adjudication and solemn procession and thanksgiving in Ely Cathedral, the end was not yet and Father Ouse had yet a word to say.

In 1713, during a very high sea tide meeting heavy Ouse floods coming down, Denver Sluice blew up and the tide once more turned up the Ouse. I suppose this was the last protest of Father Ouse. The whole Level was drowned "to such depth that the sun cannot exhale the waters or dry them up," (Dugdale).

Bitter controversy raged for and against rebuilding the Sluice. It was Hobson's choice. One blunder, viz. the Hundred Foot, seemed to entail another as the only possible remedy. The Sluice was rebuilt in 1750 and so stands to this day.† The historian of the Bedford Level says that in the year 1777, both the middle and south Levels were in a most deplorable state and the debt of the Bedford Level Corporation most alarming. Who says we have not a famous river? How, one may ask, has that deplorable state been gradually alleviated? Simply, if I may recall my metaphor of the hip bath, by mopping it up. In this case Mrs. Partington finally succeeded with her broom. The first efforts at some systematic bettering of the condition of the Fen began about 1806—measures

† The actual sluice of 1750 became again undermined early in the last century, and the present sluice was reconstructed by Sir John Rennie in 1832.

associated with the names of Sir John Rennie, Tycho Wing, and Armstrong resulting in the Middle Level Act of 1844. First wind pump mills and then steam mills were dotted all over the country, the Appold centrifugal pump being invented about 1850.* A large scale map of the Fen shows the land cut up into large squares and each square is a field surrounded by dykes. These dykes are in communication with one another and all lead to a *drain* or *lode*, viz., a channel of water of a secondary size, lying at a level of a few feet above the dykes. To convey the water from the ditches into the drains windmills are erected to throw the water out of the dykes into the *lodes*. These lodes run to the canal or river at intervals of two miles. When it reaches the main bank a powerful pump forces the water from the lode up into the main artery, through which it flows to the sea. Were the banks to burst or the steam pumps and windmills cease to work all would again, in twelve months, revert to its primitive condition of a vast inland sea, with Ely and its daughter islets alone emerging from the wastes of water. Pumping came in vogue mainly towards the end of the 17th century after it became evident that draining alone could never accomplish the reclamation of the Fens. Windmills which used to be so picturesque a feature of the Fen, lining the Fen dykes at intervals for miles away to the horizon have now largely given way to powerful steam pumping stations. The windmill with its light structure was well suited to the quaking bog where foundations were difficult, but a windless season rendered them too unreliable, especially in wet seasons when their power failed to cope with the water. The farmer pumped his flood water into the nearest dyke, and their number is legion, and passed it on to his neighbours. Water in the Fen is like wind as described in Scripture. "Thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth."

The Fenman knew not whence the water came and cared little where it went, provided he got rid of it. He has been compensated for all his trouble by the fertility of the soil, especially the Fen "Tigers" who seized the chance of buying up the acres of the hard pressed Adventurers. When I was born, Fen farming was at the height of its prosperity, and rumour tells that farmers fed their foxhounds with legs of mutton. The famous living of Doddington, near Chatteris, owned by the Paton family, yielded £13,000 a year from tithe. A rector, needless to say of the Paton family, made solemn oath on induction to accept no preferment from the Crown, even an Archbishopric, lest the presentation should lapse to the Crown. Infants in their cradles were destined to this advowson, and doubtless divers persons, despite age, character or occupation, awaited with no little trepidation "possibilities" which might bring to them a sudden call to Holy Orders and the cure of souls of Doddington. A picture of the last such Rector of Doddington hangs in the coffee room of the "Lamb" at Ely—a very imposing looking person. Though those halcyon days of Fen farming have passed away, the Fen still remains the richest agricultural land in England.

Now as to this wayward, dissolute, destructive river of Ouse, its history is a lasting monument of blunders and a warning against knowing better than nature who, when she carved the original course of the river, meant it to flow that

* A paper was read before the Mechanical Engineers' Institute in 1913 on the Modern Pumping Machinery of Fen Drainage, by Mr. R. W. Allen, C.B.E. At the same meeting R. F. Grantham read a paper on Drainage of the Fen, and E. G. Crocker on Drainage of the Ouse Basin. The pamphlet containing these three lectures contains all that can be told on modern drainage in the Fen.

way, while human omniscience chose to make it flow elsewhere. The original errors are best understood by a statement of the four mathematical laws, which govern the flow of water, as enunciated by Mr. A. Taylor, F.G.S. and quoted in Skertchley's Fenland.

1. In navigable rivers the water flows steadily at one rate not overtaking the water before it, *i.e.*, it possesses uniform motion.

2. The velocity of such rivers increases as the cube root of the quantity of water, the slopes remaining the same. Thus if the amount of water be increased 27 times, the velocity will be trebled.

3. The velocity increases as the cube of the increase of the slope, the quantity remaining the same.

4. The erosive power of a river increases as the fourth power of the velocity, *i.e.*, if the velocity be doubled the erosive power will be 16 times as great.

Put shortly, we have the formula, increase the water and you increase the slope and you increase the erosive power.

Had these laws been understood, untold labour and wealth would never have been spent fruitlessly.

The great difficulty in fen drainage was to obtain an adequate discharge of the water, because—

a. The natural fall is slight and has decreased with the shrinkage of the peat.

b. The outfalls are constantly choked by sea borne material. These two features are unchangeable. The slope cannot be increased and the silting up of rivers is an eternal process. If the velocity of the rivers could be increased they would clear their own channels and battle with the incoming silt.

Now, though increased velocity with the same quantity of water on the same slope cannot be attained, yet the same end can be obtained by pouring as much water as possible into the river as high up as possible, for by laws 2 and 3, if the water be doubled, the slope is doubled, and by law 4 the river then erodes 16 times as much silt.

Vermuyden's scheme was the diametrical contradiction of these laws. He constructed endless dykes to run the water quickly away, thus robbing the main river of their water, slope, velocity and erosive powers, and hundreds of miles of dykes cut at vast expense are now mere useless, weed encumbered ditches.

There were not wanting wiser heads of those who urged him to make nature's river the main drain. Nature is a "rum 'un," as Mr. Squeers said. She had invented a very delicate machine, governed by curious and intricate laws, intended for a definite purpose. But Vermuyden deemed himself wiser than nature, and his interminable and useless dykes were dug, and the day of scientific drainage by employing natural waterways was gone. Skertchley gives a map showing how a scientific drainage scheme, following the original course of the river, could have been easily achieved. The Ouse remains to this day a spoiled river, its ancient course destroyed, and a perfectly needless, though imposing, river dug.

"Life is very simple," remarks Locke's John Balthasar, "if we would only let it take its course. It's when we begin to mess about with it ourselves that the tangle comes in." So with the life of the Ouse—there has been over much "messing about with it," and so "the tangle has come in."

Alas! despite the good intentions wherewith I started my voyage on the Ouse I have ended after all by running an extension lecture:—

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men
Gang aft agley.”

But here we are arrived at this ill-omened “House that Jack built,” Denver Sluice. I climb its huge gates, and sit and meditate of that little gush of water beneath the hill at distant Farthinghoe, and of this massive barrier, the greatest river lock in England, which breaks the chafe and fret of ocean tides below, and above bears up, like some riverine Atlas, the ponderous weight of down-coming rivers. Human wrath and anger and clamour and bitterness have swirled in full flood round its bastions, but there it stands like some impassive, passionless, remorseless Sphinx, looking over the dead level of the Fen, a monument of human self-will and assurance. Down below, on the Ouse, two dredgers* drop their pails into the river and drag up the clayey silt, load it in trucks and deliver it to gangs of gaulchers mending the banks. The lock is double gated at either end; its gates some thirty feet in height, each weighing eleven tons, and requiring to be renewed about every fifteen years.

I fall to talk with the lock-keeper. Of course, we differ as to the wisdom of its first builders. As its guardian, he would be lacking in loyalty if he did not hold it to be one of the pillars which bear up the terrestrial globe. He will not agree that the Hermitage and Denver Sluice ought never to have been built, though he thinks the latter should have been built at St. Germain—lower down. Over the question of navigation he shook a doubtful head. Before the war a moderate traffic went up to Cambridge; a small steamer, the “Nancy,” running up with provisions. Now-a-days some tank barges went there to bring down the residuary substances of the gas works and a little odd traffic went on. Traffic *viâ* the Hundred Foot to St. Ives was almost extinct. The pre-war barges had mostly gone under in the war; there was no boat building going on; Lynn was not an enterprising place; more a market town now-a-days than a port. Before the war it mainly received ships from Russia and the Baltic, and this traffic was in abeyance, at all events at present. He thought the railways and slowness of river traffic would hinder any revival. Lynn had received its greatest blow as a port from the railways, what Sir James Macadam called “The calamity of railroads.” But a blow equally heavy was dealt in 1651 by the building of Denver Sluice. I heave a sigh over the departed glories of the Ouse, over its wasted forces, its decayed industries, its tottering mills, its rotting barges, its once immense possibilities. Well! it was low water below the Sluice, and the lock keeper must get busy and open the gates to let down the upper water. Writing a book on the Ouse was I? Well, of course, if I sent him a copy he would look it through, but really he did not see there was much about the Ouse worth making a book about. Perhaps those who have scanned these pages

* The first meeting of the new Ouse Drainage Board took place on October 28th, 1920. Discussion arose as to the utility of continuing the dredging, which it was alleged was necessitated by the neglect of riparian owners above. Curiously enough, though innumerable Drainage Boards have hitherto functioned wholly or partly in the Ouse area,—the Ouse Drainage Act of 1920 enumerates 95 such bodies—this Ten Mile River is under no authority. Similarly the river between St. Ives and Earith is, I believe, similarly uncontrolled. The Ouse Drainage Act, 1920, contains a Schedule of Rating which will engage the serious attention of the Uplanders, and, I should surmise, cost them no little alarm.

will agree. Should any motorist be induced to turn off his road—by this book—to inspect Denver Sluice, it is well he should know there is a 2/- toll at the bridge over the Sluice.

C.B. is of opinion we should pass our canoe through the lock, and finish the voyage at Lynn, but I decline. A river is a fresh water being; below Denver the Ouse has become a grim, salt water estuary. Besides, from time to time there comes up the "æger," or bore wave, and a canoe is no craft for such an experience, and I do not covet a capsize on such a forbidding flow. I voyaged it once many years ago, and I have no pleasant recollections of it. I recall two ancient rickety wooden bridges crossing it, Magdalen Bridge and St. Germain's Bridge. The former caused a long law suit in 1903. It was given in evidence that it was built in the reign of Henry VI., and apparently nobody had ever repaired it since, with the result that unwary foot passengers fell through its rotting timbers at times, and were drowned. The County Council of Norfolk successfully defended against a claim that repairs were incumbent upon them. Some compromise was made and a modern bridge has been substituted.

I have often visited that quaint, charming old town of Lynn. Originally built on piles sunk in the mud, its ancient High Street trembles and rocks when heavy traffic passes along. It is a typical Dutch town, with red-tiled roofs, whereof the tiles were brought from Holland, with its quaint old Custom House, its lonely wharf sides, its vistas of alleyways and long decayed warehouses running down to the river. There are to be seen the mediæval mansions of merchant princes which still bear witness to the wealth and splendour of the merchant Adventurers of "Lenne Haven," in the days of Elizabeth, when rich cargoes wended inland to trade upon the vast network of Fen rivers. (See Appendix I.) Those days are long past. The wide old-world square seems peopled with farmers discussing the price of wheat rather than with those "who go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters." But there! I seem to sense a shade of melancholy fall athwart my path as I walk its streets, for it is the graveside of the Ouse.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

L'ENVOI.

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver:
No more by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

Flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,
A rivulet, then a river:
No where by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

But here will sigh thine alder-tree,
And here thine aspen shiver;
And here by thee will hum the bee,
For ever and for ever.

A thousand suns will stream on thee,
A thousand moons will quiver;
But not by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

—TENNYSON.

AND now, friend Ouse, the hour to part is come. We have travelled far and gossiped much together of men and things, of old and of to-day, beside your banks, your "*ripes citior et ulter*," as old Leyland hath it. I think we will part here at the great Staunch of Denver, where we have often foregathered. See, there on our left goes the weed-laden tide of the Hundred Foot, threshing and churning inland by Mepal and Sutton up to Earith, washing its grimy banks. And here behind us comes the placid stream of the old Ouse creeping down between its earthen walls to Denver from "many towered" Ely. And there in front the Acherusian reach leads down to Lynn.

No! I will come no further with you. I like not your last stage Lynnwards. You have grown rheumatic and asthmatic of late, and your cough troubles me; your face is wrinkled, your eyes bleary, bald your head, and toothless your gums. It is "lean and slippered age" with you to-day. Yonder dreary Stygian reach, winding down past Salter's Lode to Lynn, beckons to the irremeable bourn, and I like not the graveside of old friends. For, old comrade, I love you well, and I have loved you always, despite you were a heady, mischievous, quarrelsome youth, and now are a tiresome, crochety, querulous old curmudgeon. I have known *you* long, and you have known *me* since my nurse dandled me on your banks at Bedford. You have skylarked with me, and splashed and ducked me when I swam in your pools—once, you nearly drowned me, but all in play; you never meant it. You have floated my shallop, and sometimes in "brambly wildernesses," smacked and thumped

me; you have crooned lullabies to me as I dreamed in your osier beds; you have offered me posies of forget-me-nots against the tryst,

“ When in spring the young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love.”

You have swirled the shy roach to my baited hook; you have beat up the wild duck from the reed beds for my gun; you have hissed beneath my skates as I skimmed your frozen tide, and when anon it cracked and broke, you chuckled with glee to see me crawl out wet, bedraggled and shivering—you sly joker. I have known you in sunshine and cloud, in seed time and blossom time and harvest time, and falling leaf. Whene'er—

“ The spring, the summer
The chiding autumn, angry winter
Change their liveries.”

Always my good friend. But the bar moans for you at Lynn, and you must go.

I would like to think my bones will rest at last on your banks, somewhere among the silts and gravels of yonder valley westwards, which you scooped out when the world was young—when the hippopotamus trampled down your reed beds, and the Mammoth and the Cave Tiger came down to drink at your fords; when fierce Saurians basked on your banks, and finny monsters threshed upstream from the sea; when ancient oolite man hunted the Great Ox with his flint-tipped arrows amid the sedgy pools of your Fenland. There would I lie. Good-bye again, Friend Ouse. Wave your grimy hand in a last farewell as you round yon dreary corner of the reach below Salter's Lode. Yet, is it good-bye? Maybe you and I will someday be young again. We must indeed breast that last grim struggle with the inevitable tide athwart the bar, and then—the free joyous surge and lift of the pure ocean wave whose spindrift gleams opal and gold beneath the alchemy of heaven. May it take us to its bosom and cleanse us of the defiling murk and assoilment we have gathered from smoke belching cities, and off fetid flats, where rank grows the samphire and the saltwort, and noxious creeping things infest. And you and I, may be, in God's good time, will be clean again—you—clean as the pellucid ripple of your infancy at distant Farthinghoe, and I—clean “ as the flesh of a little child,” as when I played long ago in the “ Paradise ” of Cauldwell. And so farewell—flow on—down to the bar at Lynn. The ocean beckons.

FINIS.

APPENDICES.

I.

FATHER OUSE AND ST. MARY'S CHURCH TOWER CHAT IN THE BRIDGE GARDENS, BEDFORD.

FATHER OUSE.—Well! my old clock-faced friend, how are you? You look well in the dial.

CHURCH TOWER.—Yes, for my age. I got rather nervous at the death of my poor old neighbour St. Peter Dunstable, six centuries ago, but my doctors have patched me up from time to time. I need a dose of £-s.-d. occasionally but I'm doing fairly.

FATHER OUSE.—My dear Tower, don't talk of age—you—a mere boy. I remember before Bedford was born, when Oolite men lived in caverns on my banks, and further back still when there were only fierce beasts and great flying bats and snaky monsters.

CHURCH TOWER.—Well, my recollection does not go much beyond Faulke de Breauté over there in the old Castle. Folks used to run up and down my tower, to see the great stones going from the balistas with a crash into the Ballium yonder. Once I had a nasty one in the ribs and was laid up for a month afterwards.

FATHER OUSE.—Yes, those were stirring times. I feel dull now-a-days, doing nothing, after an active life.

CHURCH TOWER.—Yes, I remember. You were in a big way of business once; travelling for a Navigation Company, wasn't it? Why, I remember twenty and thirty barges lying below Bedford Bridge, not fifty years ago. They brought bricks for Howard's Works and to build the Embankment and not a plank of timber came into Bedford, but on your order. I have had many a drink—I mean chat—Church Towers are of course teetotal—with your bargees at the "Boy and Oar" in my parish.

FATHER OUSE.—Yes, Commercial Traveller; I was on a good round for my firm, the old Ouse Navigation Company. I am reading a book by Daniel Defoe,—you remember the Robinson Crusoe man, "A Tour through the whole Island of Great Britain" published in 1724. Why I've got it in my pocket now. Let's see, ah! here it is, now listen—he is on a visit to Lynn in 1722:—

"Lynn is a beautiful, well-built and well-situated town at the mouth of the Great Ouse, and has this particular attending to it which gives it a great advantage in trade, namely there is the greatest extent of inland navigation here of any part in England, London excepted. The reason whereof is this, that there are more navigable rivers empty themselves here into the sea, including the washes which are branches of the same port, than at any mouth of water in England except the Thames and the Humber. By these navigable rivers the merchants of Lynn supply about six counties wholly, and three in parts, with goods, especially coals and wines. Viz., by the Little Ouse to Brandon and Thetford; by the Lake (he means of course the Lark) to Mildenhall, Barton Mills and St. Edmondsbury (Bury St. Edmonds); by the river Grant (Cam) to Cambridge; by the Great Ouse to St. Ives, Huntingdon, St. Neots, Barford Bridge and Bedford; by the river Nyne (Nen) to Peterborough; by the drains and washes to Wisbeach and Spalding, Market Deeping and Stamford: besides the several counties into which these goods are carried by land from the places where the navigation of the river ends: which has given rise to the observation on the

Town of Lynn that they bring in more coals than any seaport between Newcastle and London, and import more wines than any port in England, except London and Bristol. Then trade to Norway and the Baltic is also great in proportion, and of late years they have extended this trade further to the southward." There—what do you think of that. Those were busy times for me.

CHURCH TOWER.—I never got quite the reason of why your firm went bankrupt and you lost your job.

FATHER OUSE.—Under cut, my boy! Railway companies ran against us. Carried goods at first for rates we couldn't look at. Drove us clean out of the market; but you just ask their railway managers to-day for estimates for quotations of coal per ton, wood, manure, anything you like of my old freights and you'll open your eyes. Why I could be doing it well to-day, but it's no use waking corpses. Lynn ought to be a very prosperous port as it once was.

CHURCH TOWER.—I do hear they have been taking note of you in Parliament lately. An Ouse Drainage Scheme or something. Perhaps that means they'll start you again in business.

FATHER OUSE.—All they need is, to buy up Simpson's Navigation rights, put the locks in order and give me some electric tugs and I'd do. They need to cut a canal from Tempsford to Great Linford on the Grand Junction Canal, or better, from Kempston to Great Linford. They talked about the last in Bedford in 1812 I remember. Or cheaper still, run a tramway and tip my barges on with a tilting slip-way. As it is here I am pensioned off and Income Tax 6/- in the £, high prices, dear railways and nobody thinks of trying me in business again.

CHURCH TOWER.—I see they complained in Parliament that you made great floods at times.

FATHER OUSE.—Well, of course I do, but who's to blame? Not me. Why, in the days of the old Castle over there they put a stone dam right across me, and then thirty years ago they kept me blocked up at Duck Mill. Now, the people of Bedford have had the sense to put up a great weir instead, and if I do make a flood it's not their fault but because all the locks are closed and rotting down to the Fen. There were three men came down me lately from Brackley here. They could tell you of another great dam across me still at Thornton Hall, of thousands of fallen trees, blocking my current. It is scandalous how they have treated me. Time was when I fed the people on the banks with fish in plenty from salmon to eels, worked their mills and ground their corn and fetched and carried for them in my barges. And now I am nothing but a neglected, weed-blocked, useless river. Flood—of course I do and feel quite pleased to wash 'em out occasionally.

CHURCH TOWER.—Now, that last flood of yours in 1918, why I nearly cracked my dial laughing. Looking down from my leads into Cauldwell Street there was my Rector wading home, shoes and stockings in hand and his trousers rolled up. I told him he ought to preach on Noah's flood next Sunday; and there up Potter Street (why ever will they call it Cardington Road—forsooth) there was Alderman S———l K———n.

FATHER OUSE.—Ah, well, I was rather sorry about that for he is one of my "Ancient Mariners" and always has a good word to say for me.

CHURCH TOWER. Well, there he was swearing like—I mean expostulating—with all your dirty water running through his hall. And I did hear that up at C———l H———e, the owner was paddling himself in a wash tub in his cellar to draw his supper beer and capsized.

FATHER OUSE.—Well, now, about this Drainage Scheme: I won't be put upon and have my bank current account robbed. I had enough of drainage schemes down in the Fen with old Cornelius Vermuyden some 300 years ago. He and his Dutchmen messed about cutting useless canals and made that beastly Hundred Foot which holds up my upland water, instead of letting me find my way to Lynn as nature arranged. You mind that stirring young chap Oliver Cromwell, down Huntingdon

way? Well just listen. When I see a thing in the newspaper, like Captain Cuttle "I overhaul and make a note of it." Here it is in my pocket book. In 1632 one Thomas Freise writes "It is commonly reported by the Commoners of Ely, in Ely ffenns, and the ffenns adjoyninge that Mr. Cromwell of Ely had undertaken, they paying him a groat for every cove they have upon the Common, to hold the drayners in suite of law for four years, and that in the meantime, they should enjoy every foote of their Common." Mr. Cromwell had all along been opposed to the drainers, "The Adventurers," as they were called. I, myself, attended a meeting at Huntingdon in 1638, where he was, as head of the Malcontents in this drainage business, styled Lord of the Fen, and he went all round the villages and "abetted the factions who, with clamours, withstood the Commission." I once read a notice how in the Committee of the House of Commons on my affairs on July 19th, 1640, the Chairman, Mr. Hyde, complained "of the tempestuous conduct of O. Cromwell" who ordered the witnesses and petitioners and enlarged on what they said with great passion—"a kind of man who interrupted with great clamour." That was before O. Cromwell became the man he did. We ought to have an O. Cromwell to go before the Parliamentary Committee on Ouse drainage; someone who can be "of tempestuous conduct" and interrupt with great clamour. Else shall we be undone and great harm fall to us of this same Ouse Drainage Scheme. They'll spoil all my meadow land which I shall not be able to flood, and they'll send down more water to the fen than they can get away. Besides to tax people below an eight foot level and leave the rest alone is most unjust.

CHURCH TOWER.—Ah! dear me, how time goes! The many great people I've seen pass under my Tower and over yonder bridge, before railways came; kings and princes and great men.

FATHER OUSE.—I've seen many before your time. Offa, King of the Mercians, whom they buried over there at Batts Ford till I swept him and his coffin away, for he was a bad man hereabouts, and Edward the Elder and Hereward the Wake and—

CHURCH TOWER.—Yes, and Sir William Harpur riding down to found his school and John Bunyan tramping over from Elstow to preach over there by the Swan, and Judges in their state coaches coming on Circuit. I mind Sir Matthew Hale riding in to try John Bunyan and put him in Prison, and there was Sir Edward Clive, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, with a little spare long-nosed man sitting as Chaplain in front of him in the carriage as it drove over the bridge—John Wesley, and I did hear he preached him a great sermon on 10 March, 1758, the "Great Assize" which folks remember to this day.

FATHER OUSE.—Yes, and that good man, John Howard, High Sheriff in 1773, riding over from Cardington to look into the affairs of Bedford Prison. I've seen generations of Earls and Dukes of Bedford from Woburn, and of Whitbreads from Southill coming over to do the business of the County. Garibaldi and King Edward VII. (when Prince of Wales) and the doomed Frederick Crown Prince of Germany and that ill-starred Prince Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria, and many another. I remember Thackeray and Edward Fitzgerald strolling over my bridge when they were young fellows.

CHURCH TOWER.—By the way, I've seen some oddities here especially clerical ones—of course I saw a good deal of them. Do you remember the old Vicar of St. Paul's, I fancy it was the Rev. John Hemsted, vicar in 1782—who published a poem,* a lampoon on his parishioners, writing their names blank thus J—N S—N and rhyming them to rude words in blank. What a row there was! He did not

* A copy of this poem was in the possession of my grandfather, John Howard, and as a boy I read it with more amusement than edification. I searched recently among the papers of my late uncle, Sir Frederick Howard, in hopes of finding it. It went apparently, on my grandfather's death to my late uncle, Charles Howard, and was probably destroyed by executors who did not understand its priceless value as a type of old Bedford life.

dare to go out of his Vicarage for months, save to Church escorted by bailiffs to protect him from assault.

FATHER OUSE.—Ah yes, and “Mordecai Sunday,” some Sunday in November, it was. The Reverend John had exactly 104 sermons which he preached in regular rotation. One sermon which fell in November was from the remarkable text “So long as Mordecai the Jew sitteth at the King’s Gate.” The parishioners liked it and went in crowds that Sunday and called it “Mordecai Sunday”; I suppose it was a good tub thumping “down with Jews, Turks and Infidels” or perhaps it was on the Lost Tribes.

CHURCH TOWER.—One of the most famous parsons of Bedford was Rev. Timothy Richard Matthews—once curate of Colmworth and Bolnhurst and Chaplain of the House of Industry—a man of splendid stature, stentorian voice and a famous preacher who drew huge congregations. His admirers built him the Chapel on the Bromham Road, now the Wesleyan Chapel, and he lived in rooms in the basement. He used to preach in open places in Bedford in his black gown and bands, collecting an audience by blowing a trumpet which is still to be seen preserved in a chapel at Ravensden. He was a second John Wesley—preaching an average of six sermons a week in Bedford and throughout the Midlands. He was “the preacher” of Edward Fitzgerald. Wright’s History of Edward Fitzgerald gives a vivid account of a sermon on Good Friday, 1844, on the Crucifixion—the traffic being impeded by the crowds gathered to the Bromham Road Chapel. He used to baptise people in the Ouse in the early morning—anointed the sick with oil and was reputed to have made miraculous cures which made Bedford something of an English Lourdes. He died in 1845 in his rooms at the Chapel of typhus which proved fatal to an exhausted frame and was buried behind the Chapel, but the body was subsequently re-interred at Colmworth.

FATHER OUSE.—O yes, I mind him baptising seven people in my river at 5.30 a.m., Easter Day, 1842, and a crowd on the banks singing “Glory, honour, praise and power.”

CHURCH TOWER.—And the coach days. It was a merry sight to see those seventeen coaches which ran through Bedford, drive over Bedford Bridge with their horns tooting. I remember the last drive of the old Bedford Times Coach, November 17th, 1846.

“Over the bridge thou wouldst proudly sweep
And the Ouse looked up from his evening sleep
And merry sounded the soft old chimes
And the folks of Bedford came out to gaze
Thy contents to scan and thy speed to praise.
Alas for the death of those happy old days
Alas for the royal old ‘Times.’”

—*Bedford Times*, December 5th, 1846.

FATHER OUSE.—Yes, but they were very hard on horse flesh. There was one bad thing happened here in 1843. One Burke, famous for trotting matches, wagered to trot his celebrated pony against the Times Coach from the “Swan,” Bedford, go to the “George and Blue Boar,” in Holborn, returning the same day with the coach and next morning again journey with the coach to Holborn and get in first. Coach and pony left the “Swan” at 8.15, the pony reaching Holborn twenty minutes in advance of the coach, 52 miles in 5½ hours, little the worse. It started again the same afternoon for the return journey, headed the coach until twenty miles from Bedford, when it showed distress and finally fell dead at Shefford nine miles from Bedford. The poor animal had trotted at a fast pace 95 miles in the day.

CHURCH TOWER.—Yes, times have changed happily in the sporting world. It is difficult now-a-days to imagine that as the report of the match says: “The match created great interest in the sporting world and bets to a very considerable amount were pending the result of this extraordinary match.”

FATHER OUSE.—I was almost forgetting, I wanted to talk to you of how Bedfordians alter or abolish the names and landmarks which I have known here for long centuries. I have heard a recent proposal to change the name of Duck Mill Lane to something else, probably "Riverina Avenue" or "Cinema Promenade." It is vandalism.

CHURCH TOWER.—I live in what once they called "Mikesgate" and now only know as "Over the Bridge." Mikesgate has always shown some historic sense and preserved its ancient names fairly well, except that unfortunate change of Potter Street (the Strete of the Porta), probably the most ancient name in Bedford, into a meaningless "Cardington Road." We "over the Bridge" have retained our St. Mary's Street, our St. John's Street, "Seynt Jonnis Strete" as I first knew it, our Cauldwell Street and Bedesman Lane just behind us. Our Pilcroft Street is mentioned in the Indenture of Henry VIII. as part of Cauldwell Priory precinct. Some seventy years ago we built some streets towards the river and we called one "Holme Street" very suitably in memory of John Leyland's "many little holmes"; two other streets we named "Great and Little Butts Street," because there in mediæval times I suppose the men and boys of Bedford did practise archery on a Sunday afternoon according to order of the King. We have named a modern street off Amphill Road "Offa Street," after the great Mercian King Offa buried here in Bedford on the banks of the Ouse; a name which was obliterated from the thoroughfare now called Tavistock Street, because John Spede, the antiquarian, marks, on a characteristically inaccurate map of Bedford in 1610, "Offal Lane," which offended their superior taste. If it had been "Offal Lane" I would not have objected to the change, but I hold it never was "Offal Lane."

FATHER OUSE. Yes, you are right, you people "over the Bridge" have done well. Credit should be given to the Rev. P. W. Wyatt who restored to Mikesgate the name of St. Leonard in memory of the ancient Hospital of St. Leonard's for lepers, in the parish of St. John. But Bedfordians of the north bank have built innumerable new streets and have shown little historic sense in naming them, while they have blotted out ancient names. Imagine changing "Well Street," where stood in the middle of the street, and this within the memory of "Ancient Mariners," the ancient town well, and giving it the miserable name of Midland Road. And Harpur Street—after obliterating many years ago the ancient name of "Angel Street," has recently absorbed "White Horse Street" where an ancient hostelry stood. For centuries the road on the south side of St. Paul's Square was Vine Street. I forget what the ancient name for the north side of St. Paul's Square was, but now, forsooth, it is *all* St. Paul's Square right round the Church. Colts Lane, otherwise "Colt his Lane," I imagine became Horne Lane because that extraordinary, and somewhat disreputable parson, and supporter of John Wilkes, the Rev. Horne Tooke, for some inconceivable reason, appears as Deputy Recorder of Bedford 1787. Thus have Bedfordians of the northern bank busily wiped out their ancient names most unwarrantably. They have only one revival which stands to their credit De Parys Avenue, after de Parys, the founder of the Hospital of St. John, and possibly Oaklands Road. We have a "Saints' District" and a "Poets' District," and even an "Aldermen's District," but we have forgotten that this ancient town had some quaint and euphonious names familiar to their forefathers, I will not say before saints lived, but certainly before poets wrote.

CHURCH TOWER.—I will suggest to Alderman Kilpin, whose forbears go back for many generations in Bedford history, that he, as an "Ancient Mariner," should make battle when the new streets of the Housing Scheme are built, that they recall some of the names which have been disused.

FATHER OUSE.—Yes, and Bedford, apart from Harpur, has had not a few benefactors. Thomas Paradine in 1606, Mrs. Mary Paradine in 1631, and Mrs. Sarah Paradine in 1658, all bethought themselves to benefit the poor of St. Paul's; and Botelers, mother and son of a family settled for many generations at Biddenham:

Robert Welbourn and not least Thomas Christie who founded and endowed eight almshouses in St. Loyes and who, as appears in Appendix IV., was a zealous champion of the Ouse Navigation in 1697. These and others strove to benefit their native town, but I find no commemoration of them save in the official pocket books of Aldermen and Town Councillors.

CHURCH TOWER.—Well, one thing, Friend Ouse, no one has so far had the effrontery to suggest changing your name, but I am rather surprised someone has not tried.

FATHER OUSE.—Well, I dare say I have grumbled a good deal this morning, but after all, these Bedfordians are going next year to honour me and give me a high privilege.

CHURCH TOWER.—I'm glad to hear it. You deserve it, my friend.

FATHER OUSE.—They are going to erect on my banks, not on the Market Hill or St. Peter's Green, mark you, but on *my* banks, a noble monument, their tribute to the immortal dead who fought and died for this dear land. And as I flow by it I shall always stay my waters to read what is written there:—

To
BEDFORDIANS
who died,
Some in early youth, some full of years and honours,
But who all alike gave their lives
For their Country.
1914-1918.

And Bedford appoints me—me their old Father Ouse—as sentry and guardian to keep the eternal watch o'er their dead.

Prouder am I of this task than any I have had since I was young in the days when the world was young. These Soldiers and Sailors of Bedford, they knew how to fight and how to die, and their memorial shall stand while time lasts upon my banks, and I will keep unsleeping vigil beside it. The wind in my willows will croon dirge and requiem there. I will mirror its image back from the slumbering waters of summer; my winter wave shall lave its foot—and so to all time—"lest we"—I and the people of my banks—"forget."

CHURCH TOWER.—Adieu, my friend. God rest them in Peace and may Light Perpetual shine upon them.

II.

"THE AFFAIRS OF MR. MICAWBER."

I have been sitting wearily for the last two days (May 4th and 5th, 1920) in a Committee Room of the House of Commons, to give evidence on behalf of the Bedford Corporation against the terms of the Land Drainage (Ouse) Provisional Order. Two "Ancient Mariners" of the Ouse—Alderman Kilpin and Mr. G. C. Walker, and myself, have been conveyed in charge of the Deputy Town Clerk and the Borough Surveyor to the scene of action. Upon the wall of the Committee Room hangs a gigantic picture of Mr. Micawber—I mean, map of the Ouse—the original of which is reproduced in this volume, containing many names which do not matter, and many, as I know, omitted, which do matter, which I have rectified. Whenever a name is mentioned a man with a long pole points to it. A row of learned

Counsel face the Chairman and his two fellow M.P.'s. I know nothing more painful than to sit and listen to a discussion of facts which no one really understands, except the "Ancient Mariners" and myself. We had just passed in the corridor the picture of Mr. Speaker—Finch—I think he was—being forcibly held down in the Chair of the House of Commons on a noted historic occasion. At one period of the enquiry I am forcibly held down in my chair by Alderman Kilpin and the Deputy Town Clerk, and prevented from protesting. My wrath arose on this wise. That wretched Hundred Foot Cutting, from Earith to Denver Sluice—is under discussion. Counsel dispute whether "the Adventurers" and old Cornelius Vermuyden constructed this out of kindly philanthropic consideration for the uplanders of Northants., Bucks., Beds. and Hunts., lest they be obliged to go round their cellars in wash tubs for their supper beer, or was it built from other less altruistic motives? The Court inclines to credit the "Adventurers" with philanthropy. My gorge rises at this perversion of the facts. If you speculate in Mexican Eagles, do you take into consideration the question of ameliorating the social, political and spiritual condition of the people who inhabit that inconveniently defaulting country? I think not; I think you look purely to a fat dividend and a rise above par. The "Adventurers" arranged with Charles I. that in return for draining an area of the Fen they should receive the freehold of 95,000 acres of which a little *douceur* of 10,000 was to accrue to the Privy Purse. The Hundred Foot was a case of Mexican Eagles pure and simple. Philanthropy? I do not find it quoted in the Stock Exchange list. I listen to my old friend the Ouse described by Counsel as 147 miles in length. "Row it, man, as I have done from Brackley to Lynn, and then open your mouth." But there, learned Counsel for such services receive doubtless a daily "refresher" of fifty guineas and we "Ancient Mariners" get a 1st Class return to Bedford (no use in my case, as I have a season) and an economic lunch ordered by Alderman Kilpin who thinks that where public money is at stake—economy ("Waiter, five bottles of ginger ale!") must be exercised and frugality rule the menu. No! When as we, the "Ancient Mariners," know, the Ouse stands among British rivers for interest, beauty, eccentricity and obliquity, *primus inter pares*, aspersions, mis-statements, evasions as to the character of my "Micawber" cannot be tolerated.

At last I mount the witness chair (or at least I do so in imagination) and feel that "listening Senates" are at my feet. With them will I speak in the gate. Floods at Bedford since the deluge I described and explained away; I kept the indicating pole of the mapman going like a lamb's tail. Legislators sat glassy-eyed and spell-bound as with accusing digit I laid bare the shortcomings of the Land Drainage (Ouse) Provisional Order, discussed flood levels, leams, lodes, etc., and got deep into the pamphlet of one "Colonel J. Dodgson," according to my programme—I must work in his "Aprons" and "Sasses," if occasion serve. Learned Counsel, in cross-examination, asked if I knew anything about the locks on the edge of the Fen. "Locks, locks," I replied dubiously, "Oh! I see, you *mean* 'Sasses!'" My reply nettled him—still more so the word "Apron"; which I assured him had nothing to do with the Prelates "upstairs," but was a technical term in drainage. A member of the Court asked what regiment "Colonel J. Dodgson" belonged to? I was uncertain; I would enquire. When was his pamphlet published? 1642. He glared at me, laid down his already poised fountain pen, and swept his note book aside. "Really Mr. Chairman, I protest. Is all this chatter about Colonel Dodgson and 'aprons' and 'sasses' anything to the point, ahem, *ad rem* I may say to the subject of our investigation? May I enquire whether the learned Counsel for the Bedford Corporation proposes to call any expert witness—say upon the rivers which went eastward out of the Garden of Eden, Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel and Euphrates? Possibly they had 'aprons' and 'sasses.' I suggest that this witness be no longer heard."

It is extraordinary how difficult it is to persuade legislators that the Ouse really washes the banks of civilisation! Members of that Special Committee of the

House will possibly remember you "Father Ouse" when they hurtle in their Rolls Royces across your stream at Bedford or Barford, Huntingdon or St. Ives.

* * * * *

Mr. Jellings, K.C. : "What river did you say this is we are crossing on the map, chauffeur?" . . . "Oh! Great Ouse, is it? A blank, missing word, silly river, wears 'aprons' I remember and runs 'sasses.' Put the car on quick and get to Huntingdon for lunch. A rotten, broken-winded, scabrous stream, that Ouse. D——n it."

C. B. looking over MSS. is doubtful of the strict veracity of the above report.

Well, Dr. Johnson says "A Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist who does not love Scotland more than truth." On the Ouse I am a Scotchman, so are the "Ancient Mariners." Or again, when Bozzie once ventured to question the accuracy of the Doctor's narrative—"Sir," he replied, "seldom any splendid story is wholly true."

Possibly, like my discarded fishing stories, it has *grown* in details; but if there be, here and there, traces of embroidery, well the interview is described as I intended it to occur. My critic suggests that it may be construed as a "Breach of Privilege" and "Contempt of the House," and that I may be summoned to the Bar of the House to be admonished by Mr. Speaker? Well, be it so. I will be dignified, respectful but firmly contumacious. Like dear old Sir Lewis Dyve, of Bromham Hall, on the "ripe citerior" of the Ouse "I will be forced to my knees before I apologise." The story stands. Paddle away. "*Fiat justitia ruat coelum.*"†

III.

NAVIGATION OF THE OUSE TO BEDFORD.

Apart from the evidence of Danish Prows navigating to Willington as told in Chapter II., I can find no definite information as to the inception of commercial traffic as far as Bedford, though doubtless it was carried on from very early times. Thomas Badesdale, author of "The History of the Ancient and Present State of the Navigation of the Port of Kings Lynn, etc." in 1765, says, "Before the Sluice at the Hermitage was made (1631) great and constant commerce and trading was held between Cambridge and St. Ives, Huntingdon, St. Neots, Bedford and places adjacent, but immediately after erecting that sluice which turned the waters of Ouse down the Hundred Foot Drain, the river from Earith to Harrimer, which is about eleven miles, was laid dry, by which all navigation and trade by water between Cambridge and Huntingdon, etc., was, and is, intercepted and turned at least thirty miles." Badesdale here rather uses a piece of special pleading in his condemnation of Vermuyden's plans. It is true that navigation for larger vessels was stopped between Cambridge and Huntingdon, etc., but there was no reason why vessels of shallower draught should not have come up from Lynn via the Hundred Foot to St. Ives, etc. However, if one may judge by the letter of James II. to the Justices of Bedfordshire with the Earl of Sunderland's docket appended (see Appendix IV.), navigation above St. Neots to Bedford ceased during the reign of Charles II., no doubt in consequence of Vermuyden's diverting the river at Earith and consequent silting up of the Estuary

† I may add that I attended the Committee for four days as an expert witness, and I should have been very expert when I reached the witness chair. However, the battle subsided before I came into action, and the Committee and Counsel "vamoosed" away, and the Ancient Mariners adjourned to a non-Corporation lunch.

to Lynn. The docket (Appendix IV.) evidences that by the special efforts of Thomas Christie, of Bedford, navigation was again resumed to Bedford and was continued successfully until, for various reasons discussed elsewhere, it was abandoned between 1860-70.

The chief facts as to the navigation are as follows:—

There was an attempt to extend Ouse Navigation in 1812 by the linking up of the canal system. In the Bedford Library a plan is preserved, prepared by Sir John Rennie, in which it was proposed to build “a Bedford Canal from the Grand Junction Canal, near Fenny Stratford to the River Ouse Navigation at Kempston.” In 1838 there was a scheme to connect Ouse Navigation with the Grand Junction Canal at Newport Pagnell. Both these schemes were unsuccessful.

In 1883 Mr. L. T. Simpson bought the navigation rights and spent £21,000 on putting the property in order. Having failed to sell his navigation rights by public auction in 1892, as narrated in my preface (page iv.), he restarted navigation to St. Neots in 1893 and extended it to Bedford in 1895, but owing to a dispute of rights with the Corporation of Godmanchester he abandoned the scheme in 1897.

On the 8th November, 1899, a case came before Mr. Justice Farwell in London, in which the Huntingdonshire County Council sought a declaration that “the River Ouse from above St. Neots to below St. Ives, and thence to the sea, and all parts of it was a public navigable river and common highway.” The trial elicited the following facts:—At the beginning of the 17th century John Gason was given letters patent by James I. granting him licence to make locks, sluices, etc., of which he appears to have been the inventor, and giving him compulsory power to acquire lands and waters. The letters became vested in Arnold Spenser and one Gerton in 1620 and subsequently in Spenser alone, who obtained fresh letters from Charles I., and improved the navigation between Huntingdon and St. Neots. It was required to prove to the Court whether the locks of the River Ouse were made public or private property by the letters given by James I. to John Gason.

The plaintiffs, the Hunts. County Council, contended that these letters were granted for the public convenience and general benefit of the King’s subjects using the river. Whoever constructed locks and sluices dedicated them to the public as part of the navigable river.

Mr. Justice Farwell, after a lengthy hearing, gave judgment in favour of the plaintiffs and declared the river free throughout except for the Statutory Toll at St. Ives.

* * * * *

In the Court of Appeal in March, 1901, the hearing commenced of the case of the Attorney-General v. Simpson, an appeal by the defendant, L. T. Simpson, against the order of Mr. Justice Farwell (1899).

The defendant declared that cuts, channels, locks, staunchs and other works were his private property.

The broad meaning of the Charters granted by the King was solely to create a toll thorough of a reasonable amount along a river which was public and over which the King’s prerogative extended at the time when the charters were applied to individual rivers.

“Toll” franchise was granted by the crown, which would give a right to collect the tolls independently of the ownership of the land. If toll were taken there was the obligation to repair. If the grantee fails to so maintain and repair the staunchs and other works as to keep the river navigable toll cannot be collected.

Lord Justice Vaughan, Lord Justice Rigby and Lord Justice Stirling gave judgment in favour of the defendant, Mr. Simpson.

* * * * *

At a meeting 15th June, 1906, in the Shire Hall, Bedford, a committee was appointed to attend to and receive public information with regard to the Ouse Navi-

gation and Canal Traffic in view of the Royal Commission appointed to consider the public control and development of the Canals and Inland Waterways.

Mr. Simpson stated that he was willing to sell the rights and interests in the navigation to any responsible public body; and offered to let the locks for the four summer months; and a suggestion was made that the locks should be opened for pleasure trips at a charge of 3d. for each boat each way.

A public meeting was called by the Bedford Trade Protection Society in the Town Hall to consider this offer made by the owner of the navigation rights.

The funds were raised by private subscription and the river was opened for the public and the first steamer trip down the river took place.

An effort was made in 1908 by the Beds. Trade Protection Society to support a scheme of the St. Ives Transport Co. for reopening river traffic.

The scheme however failed owing to the capital supplied being insufficient to buy the navigation rights.

The question was again raised in 1913.

At a meeting at Bedford on the 14th May, 1913, the following proposal was adopted: "That the Town Council consider the re-opening of the River Ouse for navigation from Bedford to Kings Lynn and that a committee of enquiry be formed."

It was suggested that if the Ouse were made navigable the floods would be got rid of to a great extent.

A Committee to inquire into this question was formed.

In July, 1913, the Ouse from Bedford to Kings Lynn was voyaged by members of the Committee, and consultations were held with representatives of the towns on the banks of the Ouse. All representatives approved of the project of re-opening the Ouse and assured the Committee of their support and anticipated considerable traffic and many new openings for manufacturers on the banks.

The following resolution was passed: "That this Council having in view the cheaper transit facilities. . . urges the Government to take immediate action upon the report and recommendations of the Royal Commission of Canals."

No further steps appear to have been taken and the war diverted all attention from the subject of the Ouse. The whole question is now settled by the Act for the Drainage of the Ouse 1920. Whether this scheme of drainage when put in force will lead to a resumption of navigation remains to be seen.

Meanwhile I have voyaged from Bedford to Earith in August, 1920, and found all locks unworkable and much decayed until St. Ives.

IV.

DOCKET OF THE EARL OF SUNDERLAND.

The original of the following in the handwriting of the Earl of Sunderland, Secretary of State to James II., is in the possession of Mr. Glassby. It appears to be a State docket on which the Minister has jotted his rough notes, and gives various letters received. He suppresses the names of some of the writers. Some passages are undecipherable or incomprehensible.

James R.

Trusty and Wellbeloved Wee greet you well Whereas by an Act of Parliament made in the 16th yeare of the Reigne of the late King our most deare Brother Charles it was enacted that severall Rivers should be made navigable and amongst them the River of Ouse from St. Neots to the Town of Bedford, and in case the persons by the said Act named should not accomplish within 7 yeares (which time expired in the yeare 1671) that then the Justices of the Peace of Our County of Bedford

or any five of them might empower an Undertaker to effect the same X And whereas we are given to understand that the persons named in the said Act doe never attempt it, and that noe Undertaker hath been yet appointed and Wee being well satisfied that the making of the said River of Ouse Navigable as aforesaid will be of publick benefitt and convenience Wee have thought fitt hereby effectually to recomend it to you as well to appoint an Undertaker as to give all fitting assistance and contrivance for the effecting soe good a Worke And soe not doubting of your care herein Wee bid you farewell. Given at our Court at Whitehall this 6th day of Febr'y 1686 in the third yeare of our reigne.

For the Justices of the Peace of Bedfordshire for making the River Ouse Navigable. Superscribed to our Trusty and Wellbeloved the Justices of the Peace for Our county of Bedford.

By His Majesty's
Comand
Sunderland P.

X. Those soe named in the Act not attempt it because of the charge of doing it and noe Undertaker had been yet appointed although one had offered himself to do it one James King opposed by some Gents whose Country seats are near the River supposing they may be damaged by the Watermen and soe hinder a publick good for a private inconvenience. The Navigation will be a great advantage by making comerce between countrys importing coals deal boards etc, and exporting grayne and other things *preserve the highwaies and prevent the spoyling by horse by land* carriages, but more especially it will much conduce to this Nations service in being a Nursery of Seamen for Watermen bread upon fresh Rivers learne the use of the Oare and learne by conversation with Seamen make good steersmen and are not seasick and are fitted for the service of this Nation of Merchant Ships.

* * * * *

WEDNESDAY 2ND.

I received your letter and by negligence of the post but last night. I am very glad to find the business goes on soe well. I doe not find by yours that any good reasons have been urged against it, I am sure there are very good ones for it. I wonder that P. Wingate should appeare in, it is true he does not know he was superseaded but the day before they met the new Concession was signed. I doe not doubt of the success of it on Friday senight. I am for my own part thorowly convinced that the delay hitherto has been a great prejudice to the County in generall. I would my Lord Peterborow was addressed in it by you or any other because some of your Towns have given out that if it be done they are beholding to my Lord P. for it. The post after the meeting pray let me heare from you I am Sir your assured friend to serve you

Ailesbury, directed for Thos. Christie, Esq., of Bedf.*

[The Thos. Christie to whom this is addressed founded the Almshouses in St. Loyaes, Bedford, and is buried in St. Paul's, Bedford.]

* * * * *

THE 8TH MARCH, 1687.

Gentlemen.—The making the Rivers Navigable to the Towne of Bedford will be soe great a benefitt to the County in generall that I admire that any organisation the other side prevailing where anyone for to desire a prolongation of the time for meeting. Yet however all persons being at liberty to act in such business according to their sense I desire you will defer the final determination of it untill Easter Sessions when I designe God willing to be in the County I confess I saw no occasion for thy Delay but since it is soe much desired by many Gentlemen I could not deny them their request I am only sorry you have the trouble of coming to Bedford on friday I am in great truth Gentlemen Your most assured friend

Ailesbury.

* The Earl of Ailesbury was Recorder of Bedford in 1684.

To the rt. Hon. J. E. of A. Ld. Lieutenant of the C. of B. The humble
 Gratulatory Address of the May. of B.
 May it pl. your Lors.

The following by Act of Parliament for the County of Beds. having this day appointed an Undertaker to make the river of Ouse Navigable to this T. whereby that power which has stopt is now to be put in order for the good and benefit of both T. and C. Thus knowing that your Lors. hath soe eminently contributed thereto as that next to his Majesty we may well ascribe it to your Lors. as the author thereof, we cannot therefor in any sense of our Lors. favour to us doe less than erect a standing Monument of gratitude in our hearts to your Lors. which shall transmit the memory of it to all posterity and oblige it upon everyone in our power to approve ourselves. Your Lors. most humble, most obedient and most thankful servant.

* * * * *

To the Rt. Hon. Rt. worthy the Lords and Gents Justices of the Peace of the C. of B.

The humble Address of the Hon.† of Eynsbury in the County of Hunts.

Shewing that whereas an Act of this present Parl. was heretofore passed for the making of the River of Ouse navigable from St. Neotts to the Towne of Bedf. and in order to the accomplishment thereof the said Act did confer severall powers upon you as well to appoint and authorize an Undertaker of the same to remove severall impediments which might hinder the effecting thereof And whereas your [Undertaker] does heretofore offer himself to your consideration in the Quality of Undertaker to which you did not object any [lack of] fitness in your U for the same but some of your were pleased to think the undertaking itself would not be for the common good of the Country although the same be contrary to the opinion and declared judgment of the U and soe is humbly convinced ought not now to be the subject of the dispute. Yet the [Undertaker] is soe desirous to give satisfaction therein that he hath reduced the objections there or at any time made into order, and in writing hath given them such answers (grounded upon clear and so far known experience) as he humbly hopes will show to the satisfaction of all other prejudiced persons the advantages which navigation will generally bring to this County. And if you shall be pleased to object to any thing not answered therein he will apply himself to give all satisfaction thereunto.

Reasons for the Desirability of Ouse Navigation. Admit there be some inconveniences but are out Balanced by the advantages the best institutions give to some.

Where there is quick trade money is stirring and people grow rich. Trade draws many sorts of Company and they consume commodities. These things considered that herein [lies] that which is desired for many that the Navigation will not [appraise] the commodities to advance but fitt us with the like and make ours cheap. But there is the question whether it be not better that those commodities which we want and must have be brought up at a higher rather than a lesser rate.

[The reasons given are very cryptic.]

NOTES.

(Apparently by Lord Sunderland).

We may loose ourselves in Wild discourses that are to noe purpose unless to spend time and hinder the dispatch of the business and provoke passion.

If we carry out more than we bring in the surplus is gayne to us.

All may be reduced to 2 loads to buy those commodities cheape which we have more of and to sell our own commodities deare and Navigation does both.

All strangers whom I have conversed with are for it and wonder at the opposition.

† The writer is apparently the undertaker nominated.

Noe Navigable river but enriches the country.

Sr. Lionel Walden exports 500 great sackes of wheat serves London and Holland with starch.

P. B. and Sr. W. Brocker are for it.

The question is not whether the river should be made navigable for that is done already to Tempsford and Barford, nor whether Navigation be good, or ill for country, for by experience we would find it good, grayne being dearer at St. Neots than at Bedford by reason of it. But the sole question is whether Barford, a sorry Village that hath but a poor fund of 2 beds, or Bedford the Shire Towne shall be the seate of Trade.

All Burgesses by their oathes are bound to procure the good of Bedford. Wee may possibly derive a trade with Holland for leather, Wax Candles, Wool, Timber.

I would that you should have the honor of doing it or else it will be done without you.

A private inconvenience to a friend must not hinder a publick good.

Bakers alter to Bargmen, soe Millers have a greater trade.

4 ——— in age are they must have oats their crop last yeare but for trash (illegible).

100 farmers have the 2 dayes at ——— and might have 1000 (illegible).

Norfolk's Barley not most.

Build most houses at St. Neotts, Barford, etc.

Carters for any 40 they loose 20.

Stamford enriches Oundle, and those parts who came to Bedford goe thither.

Send Wool from Lyn to Norwich.

When an Undertaker is appointed the Navigation and Prices will be under Regulation.

1. The parts about St. Neotts doe not bring their grayne to Bedford as they were wont before the river was navigable thither.

2. The routs of those parts not fater since.

3. Graine not brought thither nor out of the Fenns alltho-ward, soe not likely to Bedford a greater distance.

4. Oats and other grayne bought at St. Ives to be exported.

1. Materialls for manufacturies in the country may be had.

2. Deale boards / wine / flax / tiles / Coles / received or bought.

3. Kinds timber for shipping other for building in the Fenns exported.

4. Saves the Highways a water passage.

5. A navigable river anywhere brings trade and that wealth.

6. The Hollanders have enriched themselves by [trade] at sea.

7. A correspondence with France or Holland may be maintauned and

8. Framed houses / doors / windows may be exported and wood as in Norwich.

9. If London grow Rich so must the suburbs, the case of Bedford Town and County.

10. The ffenns are out daylie and soe are fain to shift Employment.

11. Building of Boates and sluices spend much timber here.

* * * * *

THIS FOR MY MUCH ESTEEMED COUSIN MR. THOMAS CHRISTIE AT BEDFORD.

Cousen,

The great Service you have done the Towne of Bedford in the business of the Navigation as I understand by Mr. Woodham, brings soe great joy and satisfaction to me that I cannot but trespass upon some few minutes of your time in returne of my many acknowledgements for the same That his Majestie was pleased to favour us with his gracious letter on it strikes deep with gratitude into the heart of the lowliest of his subjects. But now lest my fate may desire to be the same with the over

gratefull wretch who so troubled his benefactor with soe many reverences as to make him repent him of the favour done him I do conclude these impertinent lynes with the sincerest subscription of myself your very humble servant and affectionate cousen

By Crosskey Wash Mr. 6.1.86 my love I beg to my C. yr. Wife.

* * * * *

Cousin,

Both your kind letters concerning the navigation I received and sympathize soe much with you in the joy I soe plainly discern by your letter in you and others that I must come sometime to bring myself in it afore I express the greatness of my satisfaction. Yet in spite of this voluntary and delightful ——— in returne for your very obliging expressions I must say when posterity shall see thy goodly Peramid erect for the good for our Country tho' they may say as you are pleased to insinuate that I layd the foundation and for 23 yeares or thereabouts with painefull hand still all along brought stone and mortar to it yet next under God and his Majesty it was you like a great Mr. Builder laid the top stone, gave it the finishing stroakes and then exposed it to the eye of the most critical beholder. Long may you live and with content may you see our tall and lofty Pynes stand like a wood about your mighty bridge exposing their long and graceful pennants to the gentler winds and afterwards may you receive a happy reward for soe good a deed in which I doubt not but there are many will joyne their loud Amens to that of your humble servant and affectionate Coz.

By Crosskey Washway March 26. 86.

I beg again the presentation of my love to my cousin your Wife and theresoe to my much esteemed Coz. Mr. H. at Bedford in Beds.

V.

INDENTURE OF CAULDWELL PRIORY.

The Indenture whereby William and Ann Gostick, of Willington, convey to Thomas Leigh, of London, the buildings and lands of Cauldwel Prioory, dated Sep. 14, 1546, such buildings and lands having been granted to William and Ann Gostick by King Henry VIII., on the dissolution of the monastery, by an indenture dated Sep. 3, 1535. The original is in the possession of Rev. P. W. Wyatt, of Austen Canons, by whose permission it is for the first time published.

THIS INDENTURE made the 14th day of September in the 37th year of the reign of our sovereign Lord HENRY the eighth by the Grace of God King of England France and Ireland Defender of the Faith and On Earth of the Church of England and Ireland supreme head between WILLIAM GOSTWICKE of Willington in the County of Bedford Esquire and ANNE his wife of the one party and THOMAS LEIGH of London Gentleman of the other party whereas our said sovereign Lord the King by his sufficient Deed in the last indented under his Great Seal of his Court of augmentations of the Revenues of his Crowne bearing date at Westminster the third day of September in the 26th year of his most noble reign made between his Highness of the one part and the said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE his wife of the other part granted devised and to farm or let unto the foresaid WILLIAM and ANNE the House and Site and Lands of the late Prioory of Caldewelle in the said County of Bedford by authority of Parliament suppressed and dissolved and all messuages houses buildings barns graunges examynes duff-houses orchards gardens land and soil within the seite, walk and precincts of the same late Prioory being, and also all lands meadows

and pastures underwritten there to the same late Priory belonging or appertaining that is to wit one field of land called the Motherfeld containing by estimation thirty-four acres.

[Here follows measurements of land entitled Bedhoole, Romer, Moswell Field "next the wall of the said late Priory," Barkediche, Kempstonffelde, Conygree, Haine-meade, Westcrofte and Longcrofte, Pilcrofte, Waterclose, the Barne Yard, Great Ramselle, Little Ramselle, Claycroft, Meghill, Stokking, Moorclose, Clopham,] and all and singular which premises to the said late Priory belonged and appertained and were parcell thereof excepted nevertheless of the premises and to our said Sovereign Lord the King his heirs and successors thereof always reserved all great trees and woods To HAVE and to hold all and singular the premises above expressed to the foresaid WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE and to their assigns from the feast of St. Michael the Archangel then last past unto the end and term of twenty and one years then next following, etc., etc. THIS INDENTURE now witnesseth that the said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE his wife with our assent will and consent by virtue of the said indenture of Lease have bargained and sold given and granted and by these presents do fully and clearly bargain and sell give and grant unto the said THOMAS LEIGH all their rights title interest possession and terms of years which they the same WILLIAM and ANNE and either of them have shall or ought to have yet to come of in and to all and singular the premises above expressed and specified by force of the said former indenture or anything therein contained or otherwise together with the same former indenture of Lease To HAVE and to hold all and singular the premises THOMAS LEIGH his executors and assigns from the day of the date of this present unto the end and full accomplishment, etc., etc., the SAME THOMAS LEIGH and his assigns yielding and paying therefore yearly during the said residue of the said term to our said Sovereign Lord the King his heirs and his successors the several yearly rents reserved to His Highness for the premises specified in the said former indenture of Lease at the Feast and terms of payment thereof limited in the same former indenture and also all and any other thing and things, doing, bearing keeping and performing in likewise as the said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE and any of them stand and are charged and bound to do bear keep perform etc., and that he the same THOMAS LEIGH his heirs executors administrators and assigns shall at all time hereafter acquire discharge and save harmless the said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE and either of them their heirs executors and administrators against Our said Sovereign Lord the King his heirs and successors AND THE said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE hath bargained and sold and by these presents fully and clearly bargaineth and selleth to the said THOMAS LEIGH all that corn hay cattle and all implements utensils and necessities appertaining to Husbandry now or late being and remaining upon the premises and any parcel thereof hereafter following that is to say First four quarters of wheat four quarters of rye four score quarters of barley half the peas of breaking ware all the beans half the oats all the hay six cart horses with the apparel all the carts plough rows and plough ware and all other necessities appertaining to husbandry twelve kine and a bull five young heifers and ten calves 'weaners' of this year eight oxen and four yokes with the apparel thereto all the croc ware all the hogs and boars except the one half of the great ware and two boars three mattresses with the apparel thereto and all the leads and brewing vessels To HAVE and to hold all the same corn cattle hay etc. THE SAID THOMAS LEIGH covenanteth and granteth to and with the said WILLIAM GOSTWICKE and ANNE and either of them by these presents that he the same THOMAS LEIGH his executors and assigns shall will and truly content and pay or cause to be contented and paid to the same WILLIAM and ANNE or one of them their executors or assigns four score pounds of lawful money of England in manner and form following that is to say in hand at the ensembling of this indenture three score pounds whereof the said WILLIAM and ANNE acknowledge themselves full and truly contented satisfied and paid and thereof and of every parcel thereof doth clearly acquit and discharge the said THOMAS LEIGH

his heirs executors and administrators forever by this present AND At the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel first coming after the date hereof twenty pounds (£20) in full contentation satisfaction and payment of the said four score pounds IN WITNESS whereof the parties first above named to this present indenture interchangeably have put their seals THE DAY and year just above written

WILLIAM GOSTWICKE.

VI.

HOK TIDE.

Hock Tide or Hok Tide was an English Festival which lasted for many centuries, probably until the Puritan influence after the Reformation suppressed it.

In the Calendar of Fines given in the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Vol. 6, a case is quoted as tried at Bedford on the 7th Sept., 1277, with regard to a claim of land at Wilden against a widow named Beatrice. The judgment was that she should hold the land for the residue of her life on payment of a yearly rent of 6/-, to be payable on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle (namely the 21st December), on Hok Tuesday (Hoxtiwesday) and on the Feast of St. Michael (the 29th September). From this it would appear that it was a festival held upon a Tuesday in the Spring; and tradition has it that it was the second Tuesday after Easter.

A newspaper of the 14th April, 1920, took notice of the curious survival of this festival at Hungerford. I quote the description:—

"The collection of pennies from the men and kisses from their womenfolk was the enviable task allotted to the 'tutti-men' at Hungerford yesterday."

This was only one of the many quaint old customs connected with the Hocktide festival, which has been kept up on the second Tuesday after Easter for many centuries. It is supposed to have had its origin in a celebration of the victory of King Ethelred over the Danes, but many old customs, dating from a later period, have been incorporated in the festival.

The "tutti-men," bearing staves ornamented with bunches of flowers and wearing huge buttonholes, went their rounds in company with a crowd of admiring youngsters. They were discretion personified. Invariably they closed the doors behind them before commencing operations.

While this was going on the Hocktide Court assembled at the Town Hall. The jurymen were summoned by weird blasts blown on a venerable hunting horn, the very one presented to the town in 1382 by John o'Gaunt, in token of his gift to the inhabitants of the rights of fishery. Afterwards the jury and officials banqueted in right royal style. An old-world atmosphere pervaded the gathering. Long "church-warden" pipes made their appearance, and the punch bowl circulated freely.

In the midst of the fun a grim-looking individual entered, wearing a leather apron, and armed with a hammer and basket of nails.

This was the hereditary "Hocktide shoer." Singling out the "young colts" he proceeded to shoe them with great gusto. The process consists of driving a nail into the heel of the victim's boot until he cries "Punch," and thereby incurs the penalty of replenishing the bowl.

VII.

STREAMS AND RIVERS.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc, in June, 1908, wrote charmingly in the *Morning Post* on the above subject. Here is his tribute to Father Ouse:—

“ Best of all as a memory or an experience is the Ouse, which runs from Bedford to the Wash, and has upon it the astonishing monument of Ely. Here is a river which no one can descend without feeling as he descends it the change of English provinces from the Midlands to the sea. He should start at Bedford; he shall pass through fields where tall elms give to the plains something more than could be given them by distant hills. The river runs between banks of deep grass in summer. It is contented everywhere; and as you go you are in the middle of a thousand years. You pass villages that have not changed; you carry your boat over weirs where there are mills, always shaded by large trees. Once in a day, at the most, you find an unchanging town: Huntingdon is such an one, or St. Ives, where I do believe the people are kinder than in any other town. Then, as you still go on, the land takes on another character. You begin to know that England is not only rich and full of fields, but was also made by the sea. For you come to great flats—and that rather suddenly—where, as at sea, the sky is your contemplation. You notice the light, the colour, and the shapes of the clouds. The birds that wheel and scream over these spaces seem to be sea-birds. You expect at any moment to hear beyond the dead line of the horizon the sound of surf, and to see the glint of live water. Above such a waste rises, on what is called ‘an island’ and is in truth ‘an island,’ the superb strength of Ely.

“ No one has seen Ely who has not seen it from the Ouse. It is a hill upon a hill, and now permanently present in the midst of loneliness. It is something made with a framework all around of accidental marsh and emptiness. Thenceafter the Ouse goes on. You get through and down the deep step of a lock, and beyond it is the salt water and busy energy that comes and goes from the sea. Very deep banks, alive with the salt and the swirl of the tide, shut in the boat for miles, and there are very high bridges uniting village to village above one, till at last the whole thing broadens, and one sees under the sunlight the roofs and spars of Kings Lynn; and, if one has no misadventure, one ends the journey at some narrow quay at a narrow lane of that delightful port and town.

“ There is one English river out of at least thirty others. I wish that all were known! That journey down the Ouse is three days’ journey—but it is such a slice of time and character and history as teaches you most you need know upon this island. Only I warn anyone attempting it, let the boat be light and let it be shallow, and be ready to sleep in it; it is only thus that you can know an English river, and if you can draw, why it will be a greater pleasure. It is very cheap.”

Writing “ On Holidays ” in *Hearth and Home*, in July, 1913, Mr. Hilaire Belloc said:—

“ To take some one English river and follow it in a boat is usually to have a surprising number of new discoveries, and that because our lines of travel no longer follow these rivers. When you do this, and if you do it upon a river chosen for its ‘ transverse ’ character, that is because it cuts across our present great lines of travelling, you will agree with me; and of the few rivers I have so enjoyed, the Bedfordshire Ouse has struck me most. It is perhaps the best week a man can take within England, to travel down that water from above Bedford Town to Kings Lynn. A man can both sleep in a canoe and carry it also wherever a passage is difficult.”

The late George Gissing in his book "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft," has the following: "My fancy wandered, leading me far and wide in a dream of summer England. . . . A pathway leads me by the winding of the river Ouse. Far on every side stretches a homely landscape, tilth and pasture, hedgerow and clustered trees, to where the sky rests upon the gentle hills. Slow, silent, the river lapses between its daisied banks, its grey-green osier beds. Yonder is the little town of St. Neots. In all England no simpler bit of rural scenery; in all the world nothing of its kind more beautiful. Cattle are lowing amid the rich meadows. Here one may loiter and dream in utter restfulness, whilst the great white clouds mirror themselves in the water as they pass above."

VIII.

THE KING'S DITCH, BEDFORD.

By kind permission of Mr. Glassby I quote his "Bedford Town and Townsmen in 1507."

"While the Saferondiche was of the greater service to the townspeople in connection with the drainage of the town, the King's Diche was of the greater historical interest, for it was originally a defensive work forming part of the fortifications of the town, and is supposed to have been constructed by order of Edward the Elder about the year 919. Concerning the width and depth of this ditch originally we have a most interesting record of date 1330 in which year complaint was made before the Justices of the County of Bedford that certain persons, including the then Prior of Cauldwell, the Master of the Hospice of St. John of Bedford, Thomas Peynter, and others, had, 'to the damage of the Lord the King and the peril of the aforesaid township when war may break out stopped and levelled a certain diche called Kyngesdych and which used to be and ought to be 32 feet in width at the top of the said diche and 16 feet at the bottom by which diche a certain course of water flowed for the defence of the aforesaid town on the banks of the Ouse.'"

With reference to the above it should be noted that the complaint made in 1330 against the Prior of Cauldwell, that he "stopped and levelled" the King's Ditch, tends to prove that this formed the eastern boundary of the Cauldwell Priory Paradise as I have argued in Chapter XV.

IX.

THE SHRINE OF KING OFFA, BEDFORD.

The authority for the history of this shrine is Matthew Paris, Chief Scribe of the Priory of St. Albans, in the reign of Henry III.

The following is a translation of the passage in his "Vita Offae Secundi":—

"Whose body when brought to the town of Bedeford is said to have been buried in royal manner in a certain Chapel, because the urgency of the occasion so demanded it, situated within the city on the banks of the River Ouse. But it is reported to this day, so the statement of almost all the people of the neighbourhood runs, that the said Chapel becoming ruinous through long use and the violence of that river became submerged and owing to the rapacity of the stream was completely destroyed, along with the actual tomb of the King, or at least as some assert, was

hurled in ruins irresistibly into the bed of the river. Whence, even at the present time, that tomb when the inhabitants of the place bathe at the spot in summer is seen swallowed up in the deep water, and although it is diligently sought for it is never found as though it were a fantastic thing. O! What supine folly of the early abbots and monks of this Church! O! What inexcusable idleness! O! What reprehensible negligence!"

The Shrine according to Matthew Paris was inside the Town and on the banks of the Ouse. Spede, no doubt from local information, adds that it was not far from Cauldwell Priory. These directions correspond with my Grandfather's tradition that the Chapel was at Batts Ford on the vacant space to the east of the Horse Wash. The close connection between chapels and fords or bridges has been mentioned in Chapter XVII. on Bedford Bridge. No doubt the vacant site alluded to has remained vacant for many centuries through a forgotten tradition that it is consecrated ground. Similarly the vacant site, called St. Mary's Square, has remained vacant because the Church of St. Peter Dunstable, pulled down at the Reformation, once occupied the site and so is consecrated ground. Probably when this Chantry Chapel and Shrine of Offa disappeared the ford was gradually disused and the passage by Bedford Bridge became general, the Chantry Chapel in that case being the successor of Offa's Chapel (see Chapter XVII.).

X.

THE ISLAND OF ELBA, BEDFORD.

On the occasion of Napoleon's abdication and banishment to the island of Elba in 1811, the peace was celebrated in Bedford on the 15th of June in that year. Some 3,000 persons were regaled at a feast in the public streets, but another important event took place earlier in the day. About 10 o'clock a procession of young men on horseback, one representing Lord Wellesley in full uniform, another Marshal Blucher accompanied by about a dozen Cossacks in their national costume, preceded by a full band of music and followed by a cart, proceeded to the town gaol from whence was taken a complete simulacrum of Buonaparte, dressed in the French military uniform, who was placed upon a hurdle in the cart, and (accompanied by his Holiness the Pope and a hangman) paraded through every street in the town amidst the applause and acclamation of thousands of spectators. He was then conducted to St. Peter's Green, where a gallows had been erected, but just before he was to be launched off a reprieve arrived and he was taken down High Street and put on board a vessel at the Bridge, where he set sail for Elba, an island in the river about two hundred yards from the Bridge. The whole of this, says a contemporary account, was noble and grand, and reflected credit on those who planned it as well as those who executed it. *Autre temps autres mœurs!*

For many years afterwards the island was known as "Elba," but in later years has been called "Swan Island."

The westernmost island of the three was called German's Arbour and was granted in 1811 by the Council to Mr. Alderman Green, ancestor of course of the firm which for many years carried on a timber yard on the site of the present Chetham's boat yard, for a rent of 1/- per annum for twenty-one years. I should imagine there was beside dignity an advantage in being an alderman in 1811.

HOUSE'S SILENT TIDE.

XI.

THE POWTE'S COMPLAINT.

(The Powte is the Fen name for the Lamprey.)

"Come, Brethren of the Water, and let us all assemble,
To treat upon this Matter, which makes us quake and tremble;
For we shall rue, if it be true, the Fens be undertaken,
And where we feed in Fen and Reed, they'll feed both Beef and Bacon.

They'll sow both Beans and Oats, where no Man yet thought it;
Where Men did row in Boats, e'er Undertakers bought it:
But, Ceres, thou behold us now, let wild Oats be their Venture;
O let the Frogs and miry Bogs destroy where they do enter.

Behold the great Design, which they do now determine,
Will make our Bodies pine a Prey to Crows and Vermin:
For they do mean all Fens to drain, and Waters over-master;
All will be dry, and we must die, 'cause Essex Calves want Pasture.

Away with Boats and Rudder, farewell both Boots and Sketches;
No Need of th'one or t'other, Men now make better Matches;
Stilt-Makers all, and Tanners shall complain of this Disaster,
For they will make each muddy Lake for Essex Calves to Pasture.

The feather'd Fowls have Wings to fly to other Nations,
But we have no such things to help our Transportations:
We must give place, O grievous Case, to horned Beast and Cattle,
Except that we can all agree to drive them out by Battle.

Wherefore let us intreat our ancient Water Nurses,
To shew their Power so great to help us drain their Purses:
And send us good old Captain Flood to lead us out to Battle,
Then Two-penny Jack with Scales on's Back will drive out all the Cattle.

This Noble Captain yet was never known to fail us,
But did the Conquest get of all that did assail us:
His furious Rage none could assuage, but to the World's great Wonder,
He bears down Banks, and breaks their Ranks and Whirligigs asunder.

God Eolus, we thee pray, that you wilt not be wanting;
Thou never saidst us nay, now listen to our Canting;
Do thou deride their Hope and Pride that purpose our Confusion,
And send a Blast that they in haste may work no good Conclusion.

Great Neptune, God of Seas, this Work must needs provoke ye;
They mean thee to disease, and with Fen-Water choak thee:
But with thy Mace do thou deface, and quite confound this Matter;
And send thy Sands to make dry Lands, when they shall want fresh Water.

And eke we pray the Moon, that thou wilt be propitious
To see that nought be done to prosper the Malicious:
Tho' Summer's Heat has wrought a Feat, whereby themselves they flatter:
Yet be so good to send a Flood, lest Essex Calves want Water."

This poem written in 1630, the authorship of which is not known, shows the general feeling of the Fenmen as utterly opposed to the projects of the Undertakers, as advised by Sir Cornelius Vermuyden.

XII.

A SWANNERY.

The *Daily Graphic* of the 14th December, 1904, states that the great Hospital, St. Helen's, Norwich, now an almshouse, possesses a Swannery, inherited from the Monks, and extensive swan rights on the Norfolk Broads. Fattened swans, or rather cygnets, are provided for the Christmas market. The right to possess swans is among ancient manorial rights and some eighteen persons have this privilege on the Norfolk Broads and mark the swans with private marks.

Swan upping takes place in August. The Uppers under the Swanherd, having identified the swan marks on the parent birds chase the cygnets with a hook, like a shepherd's crook, and drag them ashore and convey them to the Swan Pit at Norwich where sixty or seventy a season are fattened for Christmas. Those who have tasted this once royal dish describe it as delicate; a compromise between a goose and a hare.

The trussed birds are sold accompanied by this quaint recipe:—

“Take three pounds of beef, beat fine in a mortar
Put it into the swan, that is when you've caught her.
Some pepper, salt, mace, some nutmeg, an onion
Will heighten the flavour in gourmand's opinion.
Then tie it up tight with a small piece of tape
That the gravy and other things may not escape.
A meal paste rather stiff, should be laid on the breast
And some whited brown paper should cover the rest.
Fifteen minutes at least ere the swan you take down,
Pull the paste off the bird that the breast may be brown.”

THE GRAVY.

“To a gravy of beef (good and strong) I opine
You'll be right if you add half a pint of port wine.
Pour this through the Swan, yes quite through the belly
Then serve the whole up with some hot currant jelly.”

N.B.—The swan must not be skinned.

XIII.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FENMAN AND MARSHLANDER.

Lynn is the general meeting place of two distinct types of people, the Fen folk, no doubt mainly of Saxon or even British descent, and the Marshlander of the coast villages of the Wash who still retains many traces of Scandinavian origin. There have been settlements of foreigners in the Fen and Marshland at various periods. Walloon Weavers, French Huguenots as at Thorney, Dutch “drayners,” Scotch prisoners after the battle of Dunbar—all have left their mark on the district in the dialect and fashion of homes.

The strange amphibious life led by these people for many centuries has left some distinctly atavistic characteristics among their descendants; a love of independence and of wandering, a bond of close clanship and a suspicion, amounting to dislike, of foreigners. East Anglia felt the first brunt of Roman, Saxon and Danish invasion; William the Conqueror put his heavy hand on the Fen and the Dutchman Vermuyden

and his Navigators revolutionised the life of the Fenman, much to his annoyance. Even a Wisbech man is looked on as a sort of foreigner by a Lynnite, while one village will look with suspicion on another village, a feeling bred I suppose from the days when everybody endeavoured to pass flood water on to their neighbour if possible. The exchange of uncomplimentary epithets such as Lincolnshire "hogs," Whittlesea "boozers," Norfolk "dumplings," Cambridgeshire "yellow bellies," "drunken Thoresby," Brancaster "bitefingers," mark this mutual jealousy.

To roam, as their forefathers did, over the limitless flats of the Fen, is born in the blood of many.

I have alluded to the President of the "Upware Republic." Cambridge, with its vicinity to the Fen, produced not a few such Gypsy Scholars like him of Matthew Arnold's poem, who despite education and refinement felt the call of the Fen, the "nostalgie de la boue," as the French put it, and roamed the Fenland incessantly. I remember seeing one such several times at the Hermitage at Earith in my youth. The black impalpable dust of the Fen usually made them thirsty travellers. I know from details given me by a relation of such a Fen wanderer, who died in 1908, of good family and education, who spent his whole life in wandering in the Fenland and the ports of the Wash, friend of every sailor, fisherman, fowler and Fen slodger from Lynn to Boston. He would start out with his dog and ferret and would re-appear at his home, possibly in three days, more likely in six weeks, a welcome guest wherever he went. Never remaining long anywhere, he never quitted the Marshland except once in his life when he went to visit relatives in the Midlands where he was so disgusted with what he termed the artificial life that he never quitted home again.

Every Fenman knows of John Griggs, said to have been the last of the Fen pedlars, 1840 to 1902. He was the original of Baring Gould's "Cheap Jack Zita," a very graphic picture of Fen life. Originally a Fen "gaucher," he took to peddling early in life and tramped the Fen roads and droves and banks with his pack and later, obtaining a horse and van, covered the ground between Lynn and Lincoln. He amassed considerable wealth and died in retirement at Middleton in 1902.

I have mentioned Isleham on the River Lark as a place where Fen smugglers found the "trade" (customers) for their "crop" of American "strip" (tobacco) and spirits. William Hotching of Burnham, who gave his confessions to the *Wide World Magazine* in September, 1905, was a type of the roving, dare-devil Marshlander, probably with the instinct of some ancient Viking forebear in his blood. A very characteristic type are the fowlers and "gunners" who at one time were broadcast through the Fen, but now ply their trade on the beaches and saltings of the Wash, shooting wild fowl for the London markets from the 1st August to the 1st March, and during the other six months are to be found sailing in coasters, working the beaches and flats for shrimps and cockles, etc., or tramping the Fen droves from farm to farm for odd jobs.

* * * * *

The "bargee" was a class all to himself, now comparatively rare on the once frequented waterways of the Fen rivers. He was proverbially noted for fighting and strong language. The former reputation was acquired, I presume, because he was the "corpus vile" on which Undergrads of Cambridge loved to practice "the gentle art," as in the "Republic of Upware," in the palmy days of prize fighting. As to "bargee" language. Swearing is a language of great grammatical simplicity, regarding the interjection as the most serviceable of the eight parts of speech. The interjection was, I conclude, the main staple of the language of palæo- and neolithic man. I regard the "Bargee" as a survival of those days. The river appears to be provocative of strong language and I have heard the most polished and mildest mannered of men go into paroxysms of it when in a boat. The vagaries

of a tow rope, the perversity of an oar, the hardness of a thwart, knee deep mud where firm ground was anticipated, a sudden ducking, are primitive trials and we slough the veneer of civilisation and revert atavistically to the interjectional language in which our primæval ancestors expressed their emotions. Certainly the "bargee" never failed to live up to his reputation.

* * * * *



BEDFORD BRIDGE, 1660.

From a drawing by

By G. Langley.



C. B. Farrar.

"I am an invader."

Page 4.



C. B. Farrar.

"On a peerless morning of summer."

Page 6.



Bedford Bridge (*by Turner*).

Page 9.



By permission of S. L. Kilpin.

Preface 5.

From a Water Colour of Bedford Bridge, circa 1770.



J. H. Howard.

"Imaged by the water's love
Of that fair forest green."

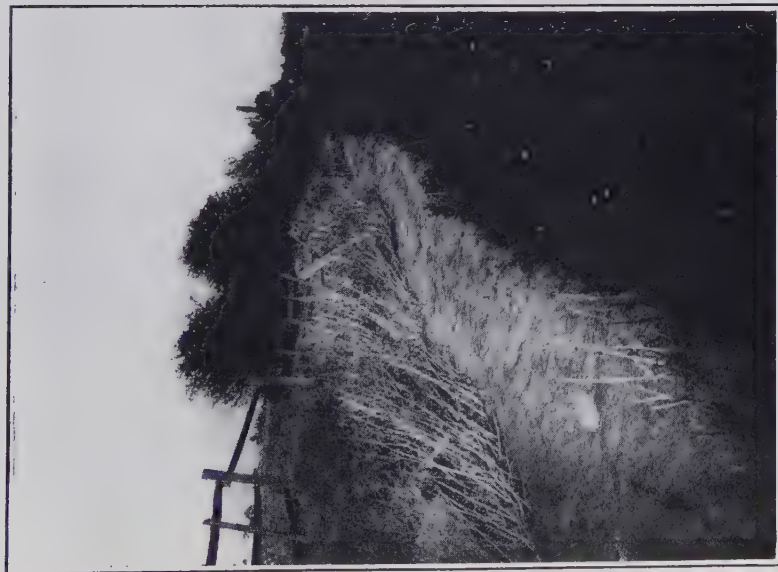
Page 6.



J. H. Howard.

The Cradle of the Ouse.

Page 15.



J. H. Howard.

Page 16.

The Ouse at Brackley Bridge.



J. H. Howard.

Page 18.

Evenley Park, Brackley, our starting place.



C. B. Farrar.

"Absaloming."

Page 20.



C. B. Farrar.

"They had seen 'pixures' of a boat."

Page 22.



C. B. Farrar.

A difficult portorage.

Page 23.



C. B. Farrar.

"Mrs. Pen" bars the way.

Page 25.



C. B. Farrar.

Maidsmorton Mill.

Page 26.



C. B. Farrar.

"The gentle swish of rushes."

Page 30.



C. B. Farrar.

Thornton Hall and Barrage.

Page 27.



C. B. Farrar.

A domestic altercation.

Page 32.



C. B. Farrar.

The Reach of Tyingham.

Page 35.



C. B. Farrar.

Tyingham Bridge.

Page 35.



C. B. Farrar.

Tyringham.

Page 35.



By permission of "Country Life."

Cayhurst.

Page 36.



C. B. Farrar.

Olney.

Page 37.



C. B. Farrar.

Lavendon Mill.

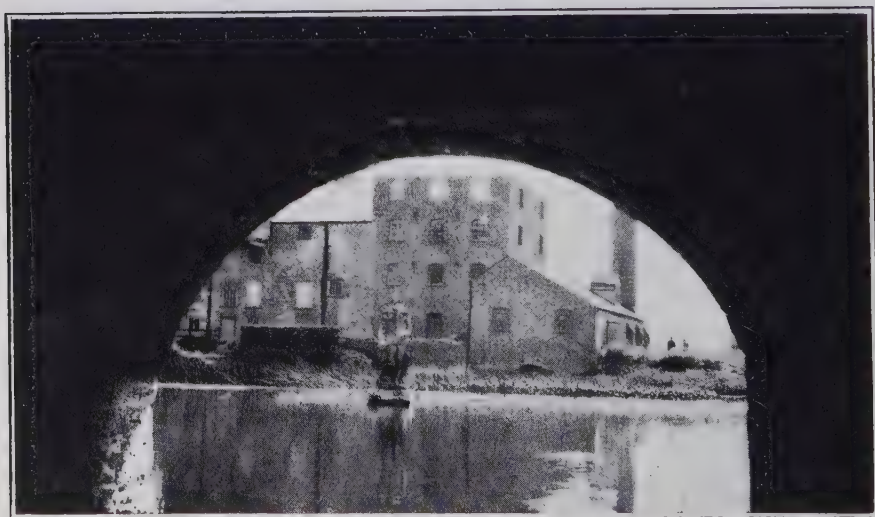
Page 40.



C. B. Farrar.

"Turvey Bridge and Jonah."

Page 40.



C. B. Farrar.

"Ikke spitte da."

Page 41.



W. R. Fahey.

Harrold Bridge.

Page 42.



C. B. Farrar.

Odell.

Page 44.



C. B. Farrar.

Felmersham.

Page 44.



C. B. Farrar.

Sharnbrook Viaduct.

Page 45.



C. B. Farrar.

"I longed to paddle at Radwell Bridge."

Page 51.



J. H. Howard.

Stafford Bridge.

Page 53.



C. B. Farrar.

Pavenham.

Page 54.



C. B. Farrar.

"Come to anchor."

Page 54.



C. B. Farrar.

Page 55.

C. F. F., Hon. Victor Russell, Lord Ampthill, Col. Young.
Oakley House.



C. B. Farrar.

Page 56.

Oakley Bridge.



C. B. Farrar.

£1 reward. Lost: a valuable camera.

Page 56.



From Old Print.

Bromham Hall.

Page 60.



W. Henman.

Page 61.

The Holy Well of Bromham Bridge.



G. T. Smith.

Bromham Bridge.

Page 61.



C. B. Farrar.

“ And on the bosom of the deep
The smile of heaven lay.”
Kempston.

Page 66.



SEAL OF DERVORGILLA DE BALLIOL ATTACHED TO THE STATUTES
OF BALLIOL COLLEGE

Page 66.



J. H. Howard.

"In pastures green Thou ledest me
The quiet waters by."

Kempston.

Page 66.



BEDFORD REGATTA, 1831

From a contemporary painting in the possession of Mr. W. H. Chetnam.



"Williamson's Spinney."

Page 70.

By C. B. Farrar.



W. Huckle.

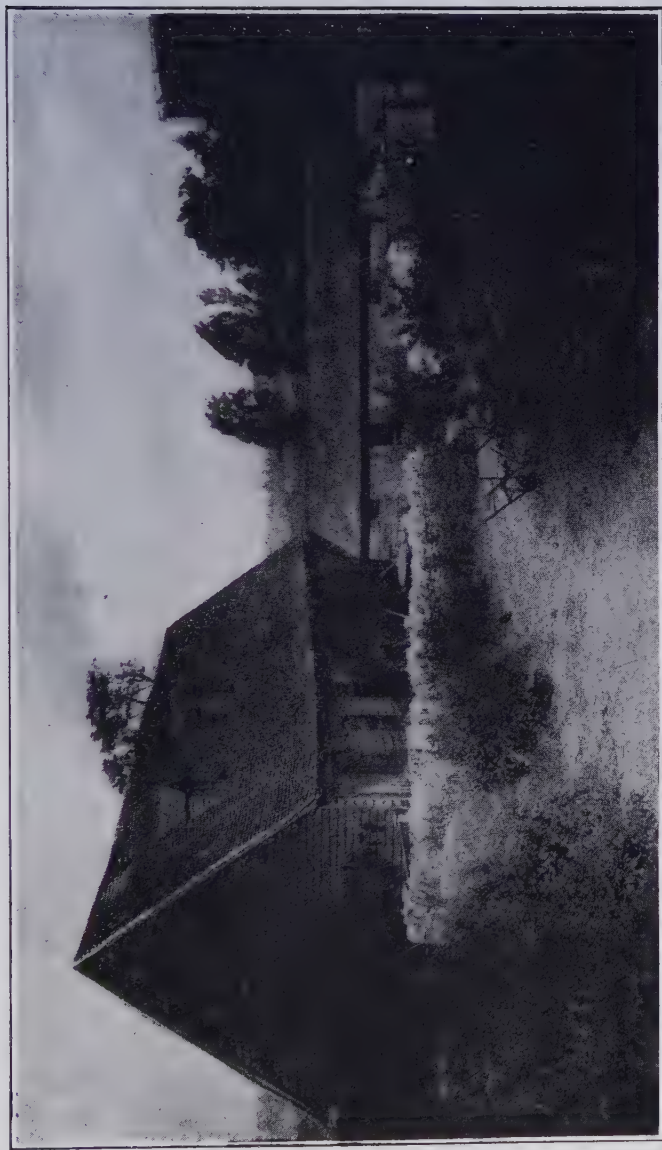
Cauldwell Priory.

Page 75.



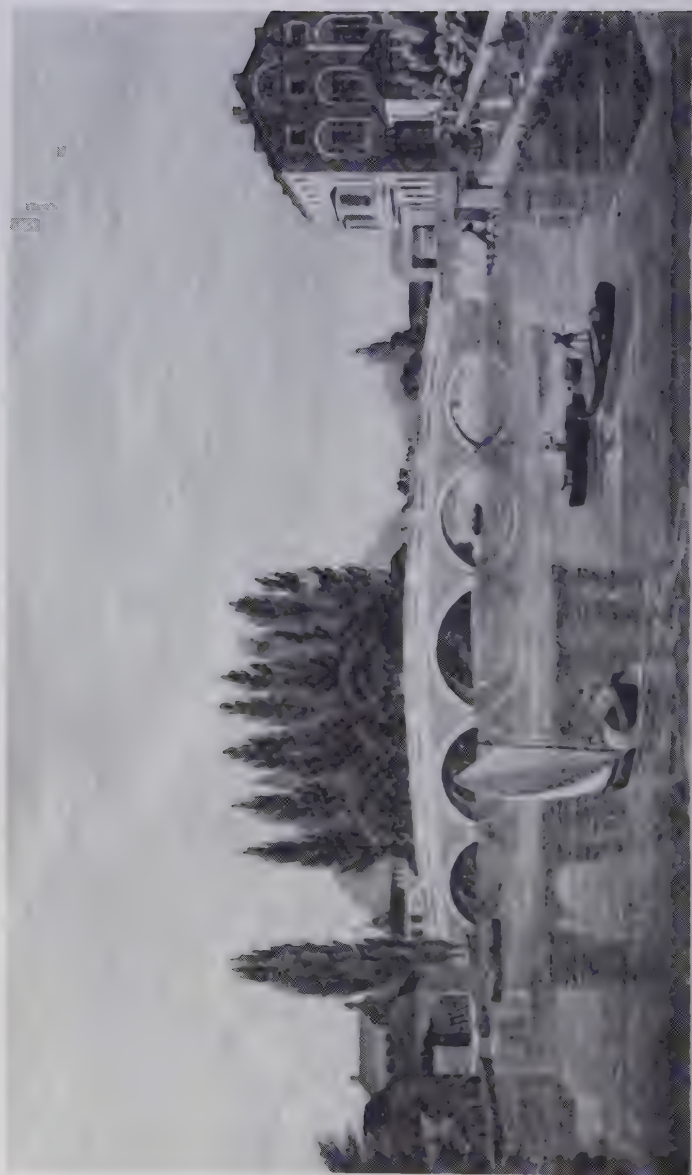
A Black Canon.

Page 80.



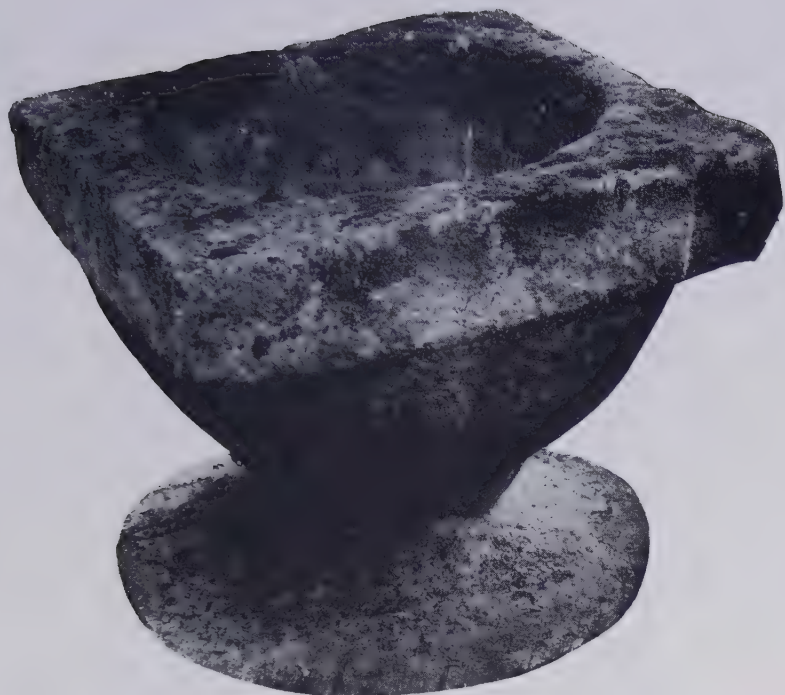
W. Huckle.

"This is no farm barn."



BEDFORD BRIDGE.

Opened for public use November 1, 1813. From a drawing by J. H. Matthiason, published in 1814.



W. Henman.

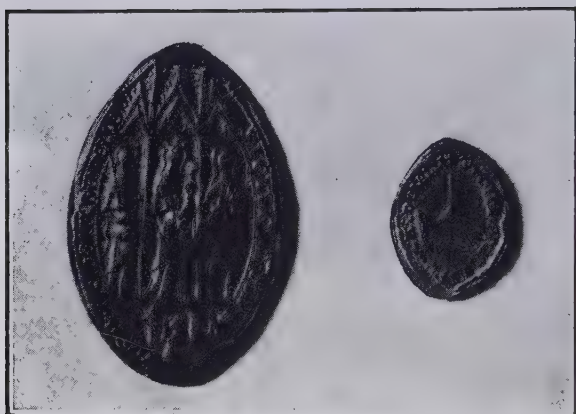
The Holy Water Stoup of Cauldwell Priory.

Page 102.



My old home by the Ouse, Cauldwell House.

Page 84.



W. Henman.

Page 81.

Seals of the Priory and Prior of Cauldwell.



Page 96.

Seal of the Corporation of Bedford.



W. Henman.

The King's Ditch.

Appendix 8.



C. B. Farrar.

"Here is the Shire Hall."

Page 71.



Bedford Bridge.

Page 91.



" Waterloo."

Page 95.



From a photograph by Messrs. Blake and Edgar, " Old Bedford Series,"—by kind permission.

Page 95.

The Embankment in 1871.



By permission of H. Thody.

Duck Mill.

Page 94.

From a painting by Robert Fraser.



Newnham Mill.

Page 94.

By B. Rudge, circa 1850.



W. Henman.

Newnham Bridge.

Page 97.

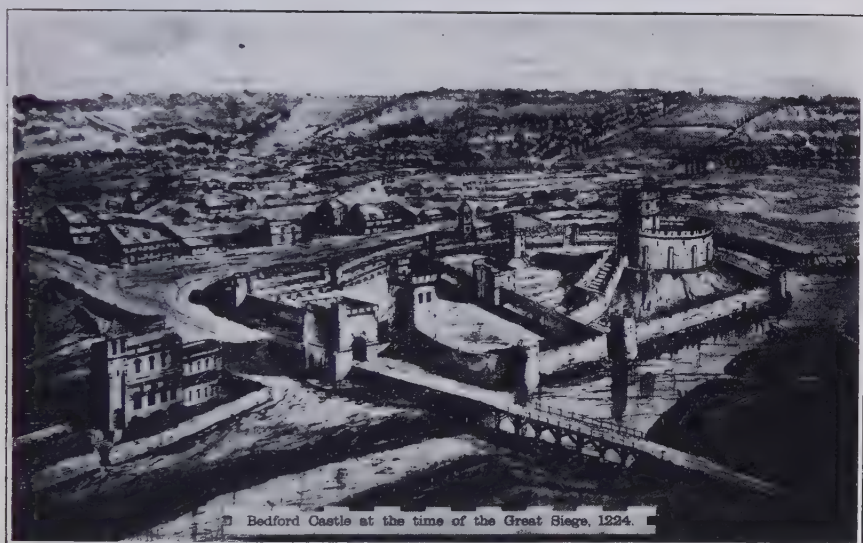


The mound of Bedford Castle.

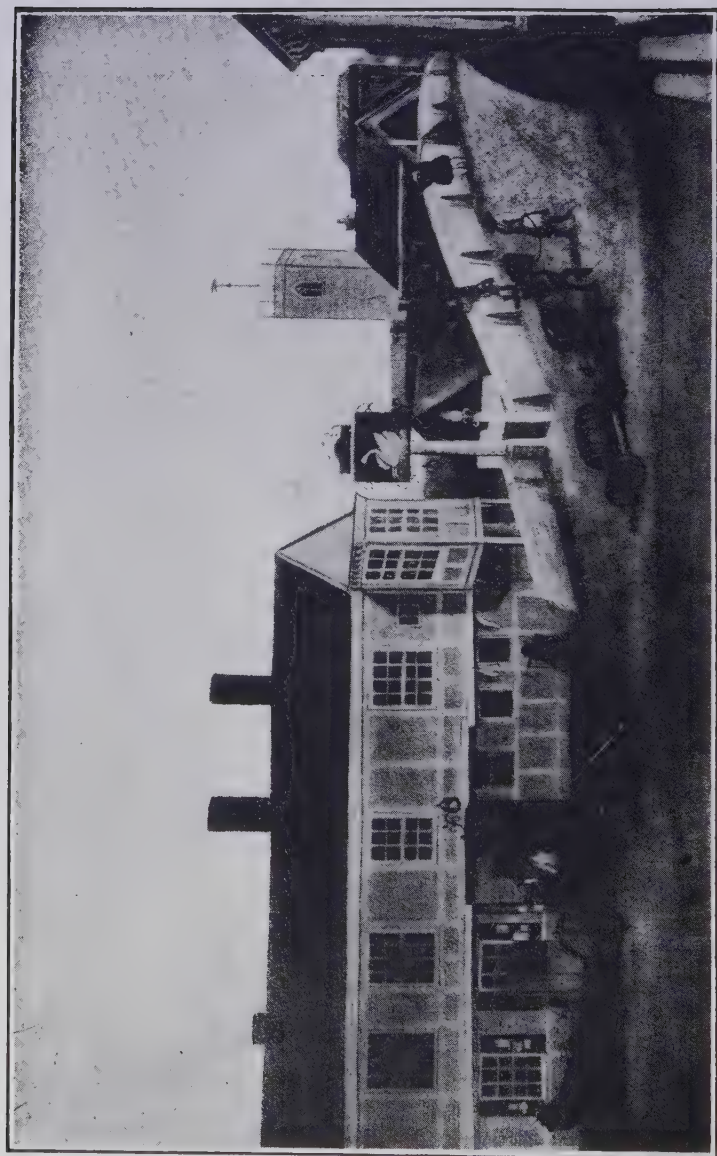
Page 95.



The Lower River, Bedford.



Bedford Castle at the time of the Great Siege, 1224.





Hok Tide.

Page 116.



The "Old George Inn," Bedford.

Page 110.



W. Henman.

Risinghoe and Castle Mills.

Page 125.



E. M. Langley.

Below Castle Mills. The "Ryver" of John Leyland.

Page 126.

THE SEABURGH OF WILLINGTON.



Scale of Feet 

B.W

Beauchamp Wadmore.

By permission of the "Bedfordshire Standard."

Page 127.



W. Henman.

Page 126.

Remains of "the sumptuous new house" of Sir John Gostwicke, Willington.



Great Barford Bridge.

Page 139.



St. Neots Bridge.

Page 141.



J. H. Howard.

Pepys' Farm.

Page 142.



Godmanchester.

Page 145.



G. T. Smith.

A River Arcady, Godmanchester.

Page 146.



Hinchingbrook.



By permission of the Countess of Sandwich.

Hinchingbrook.



Huntingdon Bridge.

Page 150.



Hartford, near Huntingdon.

Page 152.



G. T. Smith.

Houghton Mill.

Page 153.



By permission of the Artist.

"Sleeping Waters" (Hemingford Abbots).

By Yeend King, V.P.R.I. Exhibited Royal Academy, 1905.



By permission of the Artist.

The Lock (Hemingford Grey).

By Yeend King, V.P.R.I.

Page 155.



Home of the "beautiful Misses Gunning."

Page 153.



Hemingford Grey.

Page 154.



By permission of Mrs. Watt.

Page 154.

"A living river by the door,
A nightingale in the sycamore."

Hemingford Grey House.



Hemingford Grey Mill.

Page 155.



H. W. Stewardson.

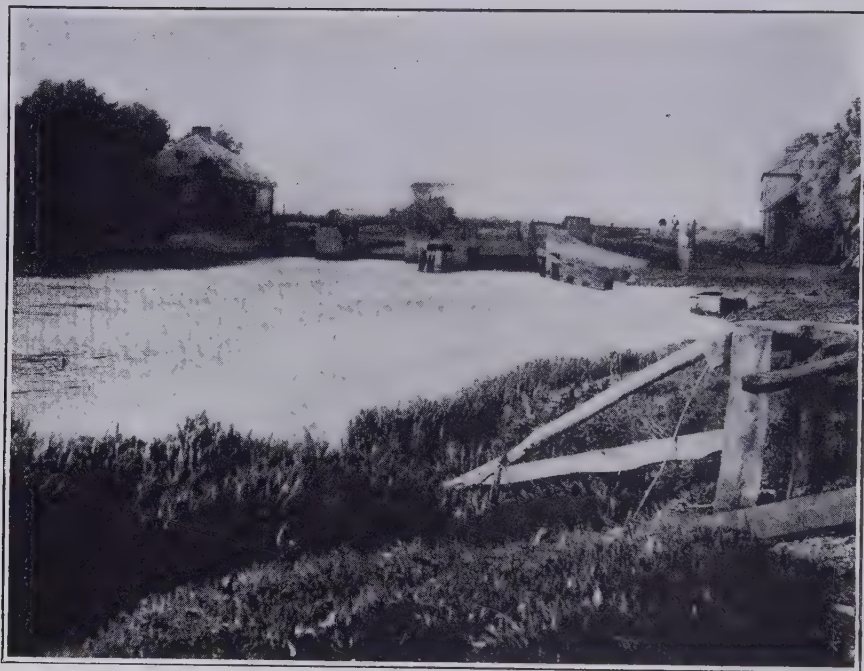
Approaching St. Ives.



H. W. Stewardson.

The Bridge of St. Ives.

Page 155.



H. W. Stewardson.

Over Staunch, Bluntisham.

Page 158.



H. W. Stewardson.

The Hermitage Sluice.

Page 159.



H. W. Stewardson.

Beginning of the Hundred Foot.

Page 160.



H. W. Stewardson.

The Hundred Foot.

Page 160.



Ely: An Evening Impression.

By C. B. Farnham.



River flooding the Fen.

Page 184.



Making temporary sandbag bank.

Page 184.



Showing completed temporary bank.

Page 184.



"The Bailiff of Bedford" in the Fen.

By C. B. Farrar.

Page 184.



Denver Sluice (from above).

Page 191.



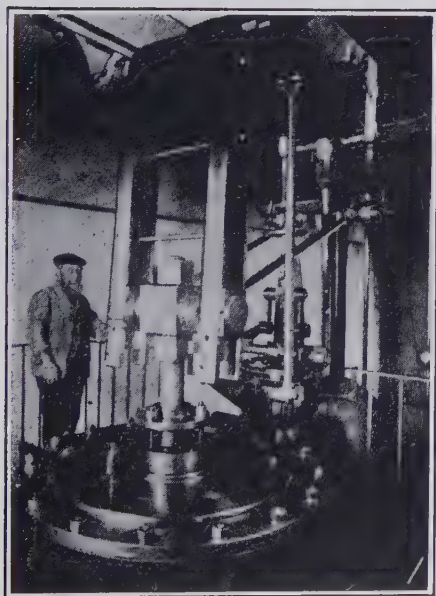
Denver Sluice (from below).

Page 191.



The Old.

Page 197.



The New.

Page 197.



A Fen Lode.

Page 197.

By C. B. Farrar.



L'Envoi.

Page 201.

By C. B. Farrar.



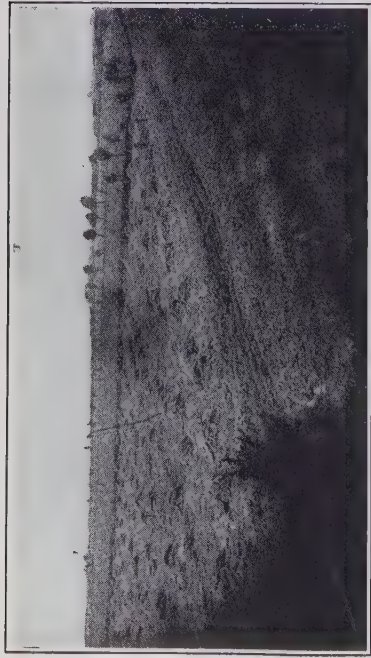
A dredger on the Ouse.

Page 199.

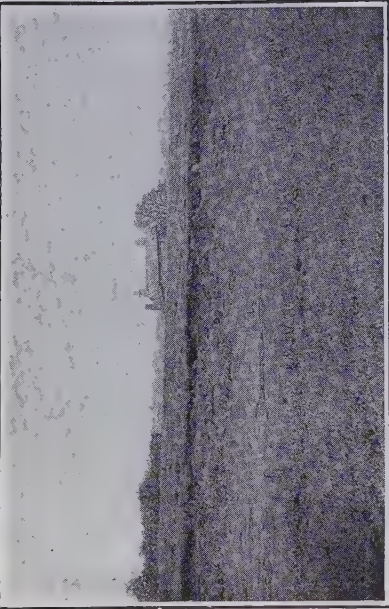


Kings Lynn. The grave of Ouse.

Page 200.



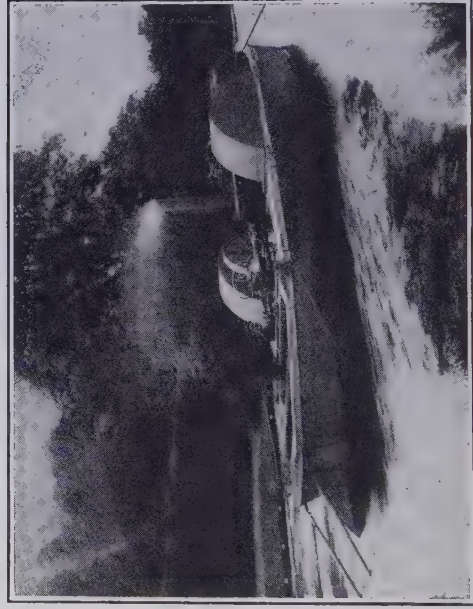
A Fen Vista.



Cottage subsiding in the peat.



The great lone Fen.



Weedcutting on the Cam.

